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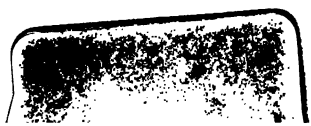

MARRIED LIFE:

OR,

THE STORY OF PHILIP AND EDITH.

BY

EMMA JANE WORBOISE,

AUTHOR OF "THE WIFE'S TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS," "LOTTIE LONSDALE," "MILLICENT KENDRICK," "CAMPION COURT," ETC., ETC.

Look through mine eyes with thine. True wife,
Round my true heart thine arms entwine;
My other dearer life in life,
Look through my very soul with thine.

* * * * * * * * * * *

But that God bless thee, dear—who wrought
Two spirits to one equal mind—
With blessings beyond hope or thought,
With blessings which no words can find.

TENNYSON.

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TO

MRS. YEOVILLE THOMASON,

OF

AVONDALE, EDGBASTON,

THESE PAGES ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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THE AUTHOR.

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MARRIED LIFE:

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CHAPTER I.

LIVERPOOL IN ECLIPSE.

It wanted a week to Christmas-day; and, of course, the days were very short, and the nights very long. It rained too, slowly, steadily, and perseveringly, as if it never meant to leave off; and the temperature was wonderfully mild for the season, making all the wiseacres shake their heads, while they quoted the old saying—"A green yule makes a fat kirk-yard." Liverpool was dirtier than it had ever been before—at least, so certain unlucky pedestrians averred; its streets were all mud and water; its handsome buildings loomed black and streaky through the fine mist-like rain; and the narrow thoroughfares leading to the river, and the whole line of docks, were in a state that can only be imagined, but never described, by any petticoated creature. As to the river itself, the Liverpoolians were content to believe in its existence, for they heard the usual clanging of packet bells, and people came down to the landing-stage and stumbled over capstans, and hawsers, and across wet planks into the mysterious fog-world beyond; and they heard a great boiling, as of angry waves incensed by despotic paddle-wheels, and shrill steam-whistles answering each other in some invisible region; but the Mersey waters no eye beheld, so impenetrable was the brumous vapour that blotted out three of the elements—and a fourth also, if we may admit the hypothesis that the sun himself is a ball of living fire.

It was the nineteenth of December, wet and muddy, and murky as a December day could be, and about four o'clock in the afternoon, when a tall, well-built young man, clad in a rough pilot cloak, with firm steps, a beaming countenance, and an air that seemed to say that the unpropitious state of the weather was a matter of entire indifference to him, turned the corner of Old Post Office-place, marched quickly past St. Peter's Church, and made directly for the great thoroughfare of Lord-street.

He had not advanced many yards up the street, however, before he slackened his pace, seemingly absorbed in some question which required present consideration; for he came almost to a halt, thereby exposing himself to sundry jostles from impatient foot-passengers, and vicious pokes from umbrellas, that drove straight ahead through the mist, utterly regardless of the golden rule of "doing unto others as we would they should do unto us." But the young man evidently cared no more for jolts and thrusts and a general deficiency of courtesy, than he did for the weather; for his face was brighter than ever, when he turned into a certain first-class jeweller's shop on his left hand. When you know his errand you will not be surprised; for I suppose most men are either specially amiable, or ought to be, when they purchase such articles of commerce as a wedding-ring, or a marriage license. The license was at that moment reposing safely in Philip Proctor's pocket-book, which was in pretty safe keeping; the wedding-ring, he was going to receive from one of Meyer's shopmen, in exchange for current coin of the realm. He stepped in then, and found himself in a sort of Aladdin's palace, for the most precious metals and the most costly gems burned and sparkled and gleamed wherever he turned his eyes; and it seemed quite presumptuous on his part to stand there in his shaggy wet coat, and ask for such a simple thing as a plain gold ring.

The young man, however, to whom Philip intimated his present requirement, was as polite and attentive as though he had stepped out of his own brougham to order a diamond parure and a service of plate. The shopman evidently thought

Philip an interesting customer, and he brought forth his tray of wedding-rings, and requested to know the size with an air of charming deference and kindly sympathy that made Mr. Proctor set him down as the most intelligent and pleasant young salesman he had ever encountered.

"The size?—O yes, certainly," replied Philip, drawing forth from his waistcoat-pocket a small pearl and garnet hoop in very old-fashioned setting. "There, the same as that; it fits exactly."

The right size was speedily discovered; the ring was weighed, and Philip was taking out his purse, when the shopman said, "A keeper, sir?"

"No, I think not," was the reply; "unless it were yonder diamond circlet, and I cannot afford that."

"Quite right, sir, quite right," answered the shopman, drawing out another tray, where diamonds, opals, rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, shot forth tongues of flame and flashes of light—"nothing wears out a wedding-ring like a keeper; you know, sir, the purest gold is the softest, and soon succumbs to friction. Let a lady begin with a keeper, and she will require a new ring before she becomes a grandmother; while without a keeper the one she was married with, provided it be of reasonable thickness, will last her as long as she lives. And to my thinking, sir, nothing is so pretty and so effective, as the wedding-ring alone, on the third finger of a lady's little white hand. Of course she can wear any number of rings on her other fingers. Let me tempt you, sir, with one of these, an elegant present for a bride! This one, now, of the first water, and quite unique in the setting; let me see—yes, twenty-five guineas only."

"No, thank you; I have no further purchase to make," replied Philip; and this time he unclasped his purse to show that the business for which he came hither was concluded. At the same time he thought to himself, "I wish I were richer; it is a nuisance to be short of cash—I should like to take Edith something pretty and expensive, as a souvenir of our wedding-day. And yet I don't know—if I could afford it, I would rather buy her a piano than a ring or a bracelet."

He had received the tiny parcel, and was turning to leave the shop, when another customer entered, who immediately sprang towards him and shook hands in a very cordial fashion, and declared himself delighted to meet him after their long separation. And Philip, too, seemed very glad to see his friend—whom, indeed, he had not seen for nearly two years —and there was a vast amount of greeting and wonder to be expressed before Edwin Haughton thought of intimating his wants to the obsequious attendant behind the counter.

"By the way," he said, turning suddenly round again, just as the shopman bent forward to receive his order, "what a queer thing it is that I should find you here, of all places in Liverpool! How many bank-notes have you been wasting on these costly pomps and vanities of this wicked world—eh? *I* am come to buy a wedding-ring."

"That is what I came for," returned Philip, blushing slightly, more with pleasure than from bashfulness.

"You did! you really did! My dear fellow, I am very glad; I congratulate you with all my heart. To think now, that you and I, who were caned together at the Collegiate, and nearly drowned together when we went bathing off Eastham, should be actually buying wedding-rings together at Meyer's! When are you to be turned off, pray?"

"I am to be married this day week," replied Philip, not quite liking the slang expression which his friend applied to the ceremony. "And you, Haughton?"

"O! confound it—the day after to-morrow. It's enough to make a fellow nervous—that it is! To think you are going to do what never can be undone in this life is almost too much for a modest, sensitive youth like myself. If marriages now could be septennial like parliaments; but this taking 'for better and for worse till death us do part,' is about the strongest dose a man can swallow. How do you feel?"

"Very comfortable, thank you," replied Philip, smiling; "of course I feel the importance and the solemnity of the engagement I am about to ratify; but I am perfectly happy and free from apprehension, I thank you."

"Glad to hear it. But who is the lady? Do I know her?"

"Her name is Edith Scott; and I do not think you know her at all."

"Well! who is Miss Scott? Her name tells me nothing; I want to know all about her. We will exchange confidences presently."

"She is an orphan, and now a governess. There is very little to tell."

"Whew? A governess! What makes you marry a governess? She can't have anything?"

"She has a good many things, I am happy to say," returned Philip, good-humouredly; "but I suppose your 'anything' means money! Well, I am free to confess she has not the merest mite of a fortune; but she is modest, gentle, sweet-tempered, loving, and decidedly clever—qualities that no amount of money could purchase. So you see, Haughton, that if I have no fortune with my wife, I am tolerably sure of a fortune in herself. The richest matches are not always the happiest; no, nor the most successful where temporal prosperity is concerned. I would rather have a good wife than a rich one."

"Ah!" said Haughton, "when I was a little boy, some one once asked me whether I would take custard or apricot tart, and I said, '*Both*, please.' My precocious sagacity told me that either was too good to be relinquished. So I feel on the subject just named. I have no idea of a good wife without money, or a rich wife without goodness; I go in for *both* goodness *and* worldly pelf. But who do you think I have been fortunate enough to captivate? Ah! you will never guess. While you have been wooing your governess—by the way, I did not know that governesses were allowed followers—I have engaged the affections of the lovely, accomplished, virtuous, well-to-do Isabel Clive."

Philip looked puzzled; he knew nothing of Miss Clive:—and he looked rather grave too. There was a flippancy in Haughton's tone that he heartily disliked at such a time, and on such a subject. Philip would almost as soon have quoted Scripture irreverently, as have uttered Edith's name in that

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a rather steep flight of steps, to the upper stories; over the shop and part of the hall was really a roomy drawing-room; over the sitting-room and the kitchen were good-sized bedrooms; and there were two attics, which at present were quite unfurnished, only that Philip kept some of his spare stock up there, and his apprentice, who boarded with his own friends, sometimes talked about "the warehouse and the stock-room."

So now I hope you understand why Philip Proctor did not spend twenty-five guineas or one guinea on ring, chain, or bracelet. He was a bookseller and stationer, and would do printing at moderate charges if required; and he had barely money wherewith to set up in business and furnish his house decently; and as Edith had not, as Edwin Haughton said, "anything," it was necessary to practise the strictest economy, if pecuniary difficulties were to be avoided.

Philip had only one customer that evening, a little scared-looking maid-of-all-work, very like the "Guster" in "Bleak House," who came to buy a sheet of note paper, a honvelope, and a pen as wouldn't spurtle, nor write the words wrong.

When it struck eight, the shutters were up, the gas extinguished, Robert, the apprentice, on his way home, and the master giving some last orders to the servant, before setting out for Falkner-square, where Edith was to be found.

Mrs. Glynn, Edith's patroness, was crossing the brilliantly-lighted hall, when Philip went in, and she turned and spoke graciously to the young man, and told him Miss Scott was in the schoolroom, and gently upbraided him for stealing away the most efficient and least troublesome governess she ever had. Mrs. Glynn was about forty, rather handsome, and superbly attired in rich black satin, and Spanish lace, and on her head was a wondrously-constructed adornment, all scarlet roses, and bugle lace, and white feathers, called by courtesy a cap! Round her neck was a massive gold chain, that seemed strong enough to chain up a mastiff or a wolf-hound; golden serpents, with diamond eyes, coiled round her wrists, and her sleek, white fingers glittered with gems. Mrs. Glynn loved grandeur, but she was kind-hearted in the main, and

she prided herself on her marvellous liberality in permitting her governess to receive once, and sometimes twice a-week, the young man to whom she was engaged. Edith was to be married, too, from her house, and her two eldest daughters, Lilla and Myra, were to be bridemaids; though, as Mrs. Glynn told her friends Mrs. Grundy and Hagglewell, who both had daughters in the schoolroom, and resident governesses—"You know, my dears, I shall not think of buying them anything new for the occasion: their best dancing-frocks will do very nicely, and their Leghorn hats fresh trimmed with broad white ribbon and tulle rosettes will come in nicely for the early summer; it would be unkind and very wrong to make the poor thing fancy she was going to be somebody because she was married. I think it absolutely cruel and wicked to give young people notions above their station, so I shall not allow anything like fuss or unnecessary expense. And really Edith Scott has been a very—a *very* good girl; she has never grumbled at mending the elder girls' stockings, and Miss Needham and Miss Pinney did. You know my Lilla is such an idle kitten, and Myra says flatly she never will learn to mend odious stockings. And then Miss Scott takes great pains: Lilla is beginning to play quite brilliantly, and I am sure Myra, when she is in the humour, can talk quite like a book; and it is all Miss Scott's doing. I do wish that young Proctor had never seen her; I might have kept her then till—O! till little Margaret was ready to finish in Germany."

"By which time Miss Scott would have been an old maid," returned Mrs. Grundy, spitefully. "Now I take a pride in marrying my governesses well. The last but one married a curate, though to be sure he was very poor, and had not much sense; and how Miss Scott, who is really pretty and ladylike, can put up with a tradesman, and a small tradesman, I cannot imagine."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Hagglewell; "but I always think booksellers and chemists are next to the professions, indeed, if I were single, I would rather marry 'Smith and Elder' or 'Savory and Moore,' than a pettifogging lawyer, or a thin-

faced curate, or a tenth-rate doctor with no practice, except among the poor, gratis."

But all this time we are keeping Philip Proctor rubbing his feet on the great hall mat, and Edith, who knows his ring, is wondering why he does not come into the schoolroom, where she has just finished putting the tuckers in the young ladies' frocks.

CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

"WHAT have you been doing all this time?" asked Edith, when Philip had taken his seat by the schoolroom fire. "I heard Ellis let you in some minutes since."

"I have been talking to Mrs. Glynn, or rather she has been talking to me, and bemoaning her hard fate in being deprived of your invaluable services; I am afraid she thinks it great selfishness on your part to go and get married. She says you are the *least* troublesome governess she ever had."

Edith laughed. "I dare say I have given her as little trouble as could be expected under the circumstances; only just sufficient to check the spirit of aggression, which I believe is so thoroughly a part of her nature that she cannot help it. However, I do not wish to find fault with her now: she has been really kind to me, and only this afternoon she has promised to have all her stationery at your shop, and to recommend us to her friends generally."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to her. I suppose she will principally require rose-tinted, cream-laid, or fancy edges, with envelopes to match?"

"You forget the children's exercise books, and mapping paper, and all the educational requisites; to say nothing of supplying the magazines and the weekly *Economist*. The bookseller's account this half-year will be eleven or twelve pounds."

"Well! never mind Mrs. Glynn's prospective patronage just now, dearest. I have something that I want to show you." And then Philip drew out his tiny parcel, and Edith with one glance at the silver paper on the outside began to sew most industriously; neither would she look up from her work till she found her hand taken captive, and the ring actually being tried on. And one look was all she gave, a rosy flush stole over neck and brow, and her soft brown eyes fell and fell, till only the lashes on the crimsoned cheek were visible. The ring fitted perfectly, and what Philip said and did when the fact was happily ascertained I do not presume to say; I leave my readers to form their own conjectures.

But as he slipped off the golden circlet and restored it to its former position in his own waistcoat pocket, he said somewhat gravely, "I am sorry, darling, I have only the indispensable ring to give you; there were such lovely things in Meyer's shop, and I did so much wish it were in my power to choose even the least expensive; but some day I hope, Edith—"

"Now, Philip! to think you have nothing better to talk about than the jewellery you could not buy, and I do not want, or even wish for. Why, dear, did we not agree to do without this sort of thing, believing we could be quite as happy without it? And have I not my pearl and garnet ring, and dear mamma's amethyst brooch, and the Scotch pebble brooch that I picked up at Egremont, to say nothing of the grand cameo that Mrs. Glynn brought me from London?"

"I would like to throw that thing in the fire, Edith; *cameo*, indeed!"

"By no means, Mr. Proctor—a mock cameo fastens a shawl as well as a real one, and I shall find it very useful—at least it has the merit of a good strong pin—when I go out in the morning to order my butcher's meat, or to visit the greengrocer, or to do any other little errand pertaining to my housewifery responsibilities. Throw it in the fire, indeed! Have you never heard what wilful waste comes to, sir?"

"Well, darling, since you will have it so, let the cameo continue to exist in peace; but, Edith, I cannot help wishing I were about to take you to a home more worthy of you. You have never lived in a small house, scantily furnished, and wanting nearly every luxury and elegance and many conveniences. Here you have every comfort: all the appointments of a well-ordered establishment; you move in airy and spacious rooms; you fare, or may fare, sumptuously every day; you drink tea from delicate porcelains, your board glitters with plate and cut glass—and I have not such a thing as a silver fork."

"You are under manifold delusions. I drink my tea out of very common china, the delicate porcelain is reserved for state occasions; the schoolroom set and the kitchen set are, I believe, identical. As to silver forks, you have some good British plate ones, I believe, and they will answer every purpose till we grow richer; in the meantime they will not cause us half as much anxiety as if they were of pure and solid metal. And if in coming to you I leave behind me many little accessories of wealth, to which I have really no claim, shall I not find far more than an equivalent in entering upon a house of my own? You cannot think how thoroughly we women appreciate that phrase, 'A house of my own.' Here I am only a hireling, there I shall be sole mistress; and I can tell you, Philip, there is nothing which I anticipate with greater pleasure than the prospect of keeping house comfortably, and to a certain degree elegantly, and yet with all that thrift which our circumstances demand."

"You will be a charming little wife, Edie. Well, I will not trouble myself any more about the lacking grandeur of our little nest; besides, it will look so different when you are there. I really don't think Matty has any idea of setting the tea-tray; she always places the slop-basin in the middle, where the tea-pot ought to be; and as for tidying up a room, she always leaves it in worse confusion than she found it, or else makes it look so stiff and prim that it is uninhabitable; it will be quite another thing when you are there, dearest."

"Of course it will," she said, smiling archly; "and now

do not fidget any more about my lack of jewellery, and our mutual lack of plate; tell me something worth hearing."

"Well, I really have a piece of news. You have heard me speak of Edwin Haughton, who was my great friend at the Collegiate. For the last two years I have neither seen nor heard of him; I believe he has been somewhere in Warwickshire with a rich but miserly old uncle, who believes that the end and aim of man's existence is to scrape up money, and die worth a million, at least. And this afternoon, in Meyer's shop, when I went to buy your ring, I met him; and what errand, of all others, do you think took him there?"

"How can I tell? Perhaps he went to lay out some of his rich uncle's superfluous cash; perhaps, like you, he was under the necessity of buying a wedding-ring."

"You are as good as a witch, Edie; that actually was his errand. Yes, Haughton is to be married on Saturday morning, at St. Catherine's Church, and he is very anxious that we should meet again; he took down my address. I think he wishes his wife to know mine very much. He asked me to go with him to Rodney-street to be introduced to the lady."

"Rodney-street! Edwin Haughton! Why, Philip, it must be—yes, it must be Isabel Clive you are talking about! She lives with her uncle in Rodney-street; and she is to be married on Saturday morning, at St. Catherine's—the children are going to see the wedding!"

"Then do you know Miss Clive, Edie?"

"Certainly I know her; for she frequently comes here. I doubt, though, whether she would include me in the circle of her acquaintances, for she only knows me as Mrs. Glynn's governess."

"What is she like? He says she is very handsome."

"And so she is: she is tall and elegant; she has masses of jet-black wavy hair, a brilliant complexion, eyes like night, and the most perfect contour of face and feature I ever beheld. Your friend will have the most beautiful wife in Liverpool."

"And her disposition, do you know anything about that?"

"Not much; she is said to be amiable and generous, and

she looks kind, but I should say rather indolent, and yet withal rather proud. She dresses magnificently, but with perfect taste. I should think my year's salary would scarcely find her in gloves. I hope, Philip, your friend has a good income, for *certainly* Isabel Clive was never meant to be a poor man's wife."

"I do not know Haughton's resources, but I should say he is well off. Perhaps the old uncle has settled something handsome on him; or perhaps he is dead, and Edwin is his heir. It must be very pleasant, dear, to marry without any pressing anxiety for the future—to be able to furnish one's house to one's taste, without thinking about saving eighteenpence on every chair, and without being obliged to dispense with twenty things one would like because they are not *exactly* necessaries of existence. 'The love of money is the root of all evil,' the Bible says, and so I will not dispute it; but if Franklin or Martin Tupper had said it I would soon prove that the *want* of money is a still greater evil."

"Hush, Philip!" said Edith, laying her fingers on his lips; "I do not like to hear you speak so; your tone is so bitter, and it gives so deep a meaning to your words. Indeed, dear, it is not right: we have enough for present wants—for *real* wants you know—and for the future let us trust God; if we are upright, and industrious, and prudent, and contented, I feel sure he will bless us."

"I am not discontented, dear; only sometimes I feel as if the good things of this world were very unequally divided."

"That is a dangerous notion, I am sure, Philip; besides, I dare say, if we knew the whole circumstances of every case, we should find more equality than one would imagine: God is wise, as well as good, and he has the ordering of every lot. Now, I have no doubt you will find that you have some advantages your friend Mr. Haughton has not, though he may be richer than you are, in the common acceptation of the term."

"You are a good little thing, Edith; you will always put me right. Really I am ashamed to think how I have been

grumbling, and trying to make you grumble too; only, dearest, believe me I do not care much about money on my own account; it is for your sake that I am anxious."

"Then I beg you will leave off being anxious at all; I have never been rich, and I should not believe in my own identity if I were to become suddenly very wealthy."

Philip lingered a little longer, and then the time-piece on the schoolroom chimney-piece warned him that it was time to think of bending his steps back again to Myrtle-place, and, with a promise to call again on Sunday night after service, he took his departure.

The days passed swiftly enough with Edith, for she was tremendously busy; the young ladies' studies were not intermitted till Christmas Eve, so that she had but scant time for her own preparations, which, however, were neither extensive nor elaborate. On Saturday morning, she accompanied her pupils to St. Catherine's Church, and saw the marriage ceremony between Edwin Haughton and Isabel Clive duly performed. The bride looked gloriously beautiful, in her white *moire antique* dress, and bridal-wreath and veil; six bridemaids looked exquisitely elegant and interesting; and six chaises with prancing white horses, and postillions in silver and grey, waited outside the church. Edith thought of her two little bride-maidens in their familiar dancing frocks, and the one fly that was to take them to chapel; for Edith and Philip were Dissenters, and the Glynns were very rigid Dissenters, and expected their whole household to hold themselves in hostility to the State Church. And Mr. Glynn, when he examined his family on theology, on the Sunday afternoon, failed not to remind them of their own happy lot; since the Roman and Anglican systems were but lingering superstitions of the dark ages; and Wesleyanism fit only for the uneducated masses, for "hands" in factories, and colliers, and navvies, and Jack-tars; and Quakerism undesirable though respectable; and every other "ism," except Mr. Glynn's own particular *ism*, from Judaism down to the newest phase of Mormonism, entirely and universally objectionable. Mr. Glynn, you perceive, was not a member of

the Evangelical Alliance. He was not at all the kind of Nonconformist I should recommend to your acquaintance; and his ethics, and politics, and literary tendencies were all of the same fortunate character as his religion; they occupied the very centre of undeniable orthodoxy, and all beyond a certain very limited margin was heterodoxy. Happy Mr. Glynn, to be always in the right, while his neighbours were more or less in continual error!

The housemaid, who had also witnessed the grand wedding at St. Catherine's, told the cook it was a great mercy Miss Scott was a Dissenter, as she had not a male relation belonging to her; for at church you must be "give away," while at chapel you could be "*took*." And Edith, who overheard this sagacious remark, felt rather glad she had no reason to hunt up any gentleman acquaintance to perform the paternal part of the ceremony; but it made her feel rather desolate, and she wished she had not been reminded just then of her orphan condition.

But she had little time for the indulgence of tender remembrances, for the short winter days passed with wonderful celerity, and Christmas Eve came, and she could only think of the momentous event of the morrow.

Late in the afternoon she was busy in her room packing up her little properties, including the electro-plated tea-pot presented by Mrs. Glynn, the family Bible by Mr. Glynn, and the set of chimney ornaments by her pupils, when Myra came to say that Miss Wilson was in the dining-room, and wanted to see Miss Scott. Miss Wilson was an elderly lady of limited income and unlimited benevolence; she was distantly related to the Glynns, and had always taken a kindly interest in Edith and her engagement, and now she said she wished to see her once more before she became Edith Proctor.

Edith ran down stairs willingly enough, and in the dining-room she found Miss Wilson alone. There were sundry questions to be asked and answered, and some hearty good wishes to be expressed, and then Miss Wilson began: "Now, my dear, though I have never been married myself, I have seen a good deal of married life, and there are one or two

things I should like to say, if I might take the liberty—may I?"

"Certainly, Miss Wilson; I am sure advice from you will be worth having."

"My dear, I don't dignify it by the name of advice; I have only a few hints to offer. In the first place, when your domestic concerns plague you, as they will some time or other more or less, keep the plague to yourself, and don't pour out your troubles in your husband's ears when he comes in to meals or sits down at night, when business is over. He has had his perplexities, you may be sure, and he wants rest and not worry. Mind, I do not mean that you are to have secrets from him—nothing engenders misery in the marriage state so certainly as want of confidence—but there is no reason why you should entertain him with a catalogue of culinary disasters, or the misdemeanours of your maid-of-all-work. Don't give him a graphic description of the state in which you found your saucepans; don't repeat verbatim the interesting dialogue between yourself and Sally, in consequence of flue under the best bed, and don't make an exact calculation of the quantity of cinders thrown unriddled into the dust-heap, for his benefit. Keep your petty housekeeping troubles to yourself if you wish to keep your husband affectionate and good-tempered in his own house; and don't relieve your mind by unsettling his; and don't make him the instrument of your wrath when Sally's negligence or pertness reaches a climax. And by-the-by, my dear, if Sally is very saucy, just examine yourself and see whether you have not been a little provoking. We must always remember how much is required of servants, and how little they have been taught to reason or to control their feelings and tempers. I think a really good mistress may always succeed in finding and keeping really good servants."

"I do not think, Miss Wilson, I ever should be so foolish as to tease Philip about little matters that are essentially woman's work; but I am much obliged to you, for I never thought of the subject before. Have you ever known wives tormenting their husbands after this fashion?"

"Alas, child, yes! I have heard many silly women begin pouring out their little troubles as soon as their husband enters the room: I never knew such a woman command her husband's respect for any length of time, and I never knew her make a happy home for her children as they grew up. Always meet your husband with a smile, and study his taste in dress, and keep your room neat and cheerful. And one thing, Edith: *have your fire bright and clear, and your hearth swept up,* when he comes in in winter time; and remember to have his slippers warming at night. A man who has to rough it with the world all day thinks a great deal of such little attentions from his wife. Last of all, dear, avoid the first quarrel, and remember that there is one, or rather there are two things that men never overlook—viz., buttonless shirts and stringless or buttonless collars."

"I will try to remember," said Edith, gravely. "Miss Wilson, I want to be a good wife; I mean to try."

"Edith! may I ask you one question?"

"Twenty, if you like, dear Miss Wilson; I know you are kindness itself."

"Then, Edith, I want to know—it is the most momentous question one human creature can put to another—are you a Christian?"

Edith's eyes fell, and fell, till they rested on the carpet at her feet, and her brows and cheeks flushed crimson. Then, lifting up for a moment the downcast gaze, she said, while the soft brown eyes filled with tears, "No!"

"And Mr. Proctor?"

"I suppose," and her voice grew husky and unsteady, "he is no Christian, or he would not marry me."

"And do you wish to remain as you are? Are you willing to live on in the world enjoying God's good gifts without rendering him the service of your heart? Are you willing to live daily and hourly on the brink of a precipice? Are you willing to miss his peace, his joy, his promises for this life, and for the life that is to come? Edith, dear! you may be an exemplary wife, but you will never be a happy wife while you do not love your Saviour. You may rise up early and

sit up late, and toil and deny yourself; but remember it is written, 'Except *the Lord* build the house, they labour in vain that build it.'"

"I have often wished to be religious," said Edith, through her tears; "but I should not like to be like Mr. Glynn."

"My dear! do not confuse the faults of professors with profession itself. He has many good points, but he lacks charity; he does not believe in the Holy Catholic Church."

Edith looked up in wonder; then she caught Miss Wilson's meaning, and she said, "*That* Church includes good people of every denomination."

"Yes, Christians in the Establishment and out of it; all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth; the Church of the Firstborn—the Church that is founded on the Rock of Ages—the Church of the redeemed and the sanctified of all nations, all ages, and all creeds! Do you ask the qualification for membership in that Divine Universal Church? It is *love of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Pray, my child, that yourself and your husband may soon be admitted into that blessed communion."

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

CHRISTMAS morning dawned, and Edith awoke long before the first glimmer of light shone in at her attic window. It was very cold when she drew up the blind and looked across the square, where the gas-lamps were yet burning. The sky was cloudy; but here and there a pale star glimmered for an instant, and was lost again beneath its misty veil. All was quiet and still, as though it were yet night, and the policeman's measured tramp rang echoingly along the solitary pavement. Edith could not resist the temptation to throw up the sash, and gaze out into the silent world, and take a last farewell of certain slate roofs and house-fronts, that seemed now

so strangely familiar she could scarcely believe they would meet her gaze from that spot no more. She looked across the dark square garden, where she had so often watched the children at their play; she gazed up and down the line of road she had traversed almost daily with her young charges, for nearly two years; she looked upward to the cloudy canopy above, and watched first one and then another fading star glide quickly out of sight; and then the lamp-lighter —or rather the lamp-extinguisher—came along with his ladder, and a sudden line of yellow light broke across the dull grey eastern horizon, and Edith remembered that she had still one trunk to finish packing, and many little matters to attend to before her arrangements were completed.

So she closed the window, and kneeling down before the open trunk, proceeded to fill it with the various articles piled up around it. Her candle began to burn dimly in the sickly dawnlight of the chilly Christmas morning, and she herself shivered with cold, for the open window had by no means improved the atmosphere of the room. When the last thing was packed and the trunk closed and locked, Edith sat quietly down, and gave herself up to reflection. She was annoyed with herself, for she was feeling very miserable; and yet it was her wedding day, and she was going to marry the only man in the world whom she could ever love, or care to marry. She tried in vain to analyze her emotions; she was sure that she thoroughly loved Philip, and her confidence in him was complete; she cared nothing for the luxuries and amenities of life that she was going to leave behind her, for she was about to enjoy that greatest luxury of woman's existence, a house of her own; and just at that moment there seemed to be, as far as she was concerned, a sad dearth of comfort, to say nothing of luxury. Perhaps it was existing circumstances that made her so depressed: she could not help thinking how different it was with other girls in her position who had mother, and family, and friends. Her preparations had been made with great difficulty; she had had very little assistance, and still less sympathy; and now, on the morning of the most eventful day of her life, no one seemed at all

interested in the event that to her was of such deep moment —no one came to render those little services, to perform those petty labours of love, that affectionate friends and relatives are generally so solicitous to render to young brides. It made her feel acutely how sad a thing it is for a woman, orphaned and kindredless, to be thrown portionless on a cold, heartless world, in this Mammon-worshipping age, the nineteenth century. But then came the cheering thought, this was the last time she would be alone; henceforth there would be one by her side, who would be father, mother, brother, sister, friend, and the whole world besides; so she rose up cheerily, and scolded herself well for being so morbid and miserable; what had she to do with sadness on the eve of so much happiness? She felt as if the last hour's reflections had been almost a failure of allegiance towards Philip.

Then, as she busied herself about several little minor matters, she remembered Miss Wilson's question, "Are you a Christian?" and then it occurred to her that she had dressed hastily, and proceeded with her packing, without a moment of prayer—without asking God to bless the union, to which she was that day to pledge herself in his sight. "No wonder I felt wretched," she said to herself, both grieved and humbled at her omission; and she knelt down at once, and tried to *say her prayers*. But somehow the form, or rather the set of petitions which had gradually grown into a form, and which had constituted, with scarcely any variety, her private devotions ever since she had grown out of childhood, seemed in that hour altogether dull and expressionless. Involuntarily she sought other words to express her meaning; but all she could do was to ask God to bless her in the new relation she was that morning to assume, to bless her and make her a good wife, to bless Philip, and keep them both together, one in heart, and one in mutual love and tenderness, whatever opposing influences, whatever adverse circumstances, might gather round their path; to keep them true in all things, faithful and devoted to each other, to their lives' end. Neither could she rise without adding one more petition—"O Lord! make me a true Christian, and make my dear Philip a Christian.

also. We do not know the way; show it to us, and lead us in it, for thy name's sake. Amen."

She rose, calmed and comforted. Those few words of prayer seemed to have supplied all that was wanting to invest the event of the day with brightness and dignity; and yet for one minute a shadowy fear fell upon her, lest the last clause of her prayer might be answered, as she well knew such prayers sometimes were, by long discipline and heavy chastening, which in the present seem not joyous, but grievous, though afterward they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

While she knelt, the grey light had stolen in, and there was even a rosy gleam in the fast brightening sky; after all, the sun might come out, and there might be a cheery, pleasant, seasonable Christmas Day. Some one came to her door, knocking for admittance. She opened, and there was cook, with her large kitchen apron on, and her arms already bared, in anticipation of culinary triumphs yet to be achieved, for a large party were to dine and spend the day with the Glynns.

"Goodness gracious me, Miss Scott!" cried cook, grating an imaginary nutmeg on the back of her hand—"you look like a ghost; you are just as pale and cold as one: I dare say you've been up hours and hours, all by yourself! Just come right down into the best kitchen; there's a fire there I promise you; and I've got a cup of coffee ready, hot and strong; and I'll boil a egg, and broil a chop or a rasher of bacon, and make a round or two of toast, in less than no time. Just come you down; there ain't nobody stirring yet; and if you don't mean to go out to get married on an empty stomach, you had better come this minute—it's gone eight."

"But the young ladies," said Edith—"O dear!—quite forgot them; do call them, cook: they are going with me, you know; and they will want their breakfast."

"Never you mind about the children's breakfast, Miss Scott. Miss Myra, she says last night to Ellen, 'Ellen, bring us our breakfastes at half-past eight; we'll breakfast in bed, and then get up and dress at once, and be ready for Miss Scott by half-past nine.' O! Ellen will see to them dressing, and

breakfastes and all: no fear of them going out into the cold fasting; they'll take care ov themselves, and their ma 'll take care, and everybody 'll take care. But nobody seemed to be looking after you: so I says to Ellen, and to Sarah, 'I'll make bold to go and fetch Miss Scott down to a cup of hot coffee, for there's to be no schoolroom breakfast this morning; and she must feel lost-like—not a soul a-going near her on her wedding-morning.' And Sarah, says she, '*Do*, and I'll sweep up the hearth.' And Ellen, says she, '*Do*, and I'll lay the cloth on the little round table.' So do 'ee come, miss, and get some life into you, and some colour into your cheeks, else your gentleman will be thinking you're repenting of your bargain."

Edith, with a grateful sense of the homely kindness of cook and her satellites, complied with the invitation. And truly the bright blaze, the clean kitchen hearth, and the odour of ham and toast and coffee, made a wondrous difference in Edith's feelings; and though unable to gratify cook's sense of hospitality by eating a whole dishful of broiled ham, a couple of eggs, a round of buttered toast, a sausage, and a mince-pie, she managed to make a very creditable breakfast, and actually enjoyed her coffee and her toast and one egg in very unromantic fashion.

"Well, miss! I do wish you joy!" said cook again, as she emerged from the back settlements with the stuffing ready for the turkey. "I am right glad you're going to have a house of your own, where you can have what you fancy for your dinner, and be at nobody's beck nor call—that's what I'm hoping for some of these days, when my young man can see his way clear to a good tripe and cow-heel connection in Birmingham, where he's gone to live waiter in a splendid eating 'ouse. But I'm sorry you're going, for there's always such jangles with the missusses and the governesses. I bepities 'em, poor souls, I do! I don't mind saying it now, Miss Scott, seeing as you've happily done with governessing—but they ain't near as well off as we servants. We get our work done and then sit down to a nice bit of supper, and have some fun, for we're all equals; but the governess, when her work's

done, if it's ever done, sits all alone in the schoolroom of a night with no one to speak to, and nothing to think on but the better days as are gone and the worser days as is coming. As for going into the drawing-room of nights, bless me! I should think as no gove'ness who has her right senses would do that. And I'd come and help you dress, miss, for it's a crying shame for a bride to have to dress herself; and your bridesmaids 'll none think of anybody's dress but their own; but you see, miss, as it's Christmas Day, and I've the turkey on my mind, and the beef, and the soup, to say nothing of the pudding, and the tarts, and the almond cream, and the lemon-cheesecakes; and the whisk isn't to be found high or low, as I am a sinful woman; an' I know the mince-pies ain't quite up to the mark."

It did seem rather an unorthodox proceeding for a bride to attire herself for the altar; but seeing that cook's kind will must be taken for the deed, and that the housemaid was sweeping the dining-room carpet, and that Ellen was occupied with the young ladies, and that the inferior servants were up to their elbows in work, obeying the behests of that culinary high-priestess, the cook, and Mr. and Mrs. Glynn were in bed, and probably dreaming, there seemed no alternative, so she ascended once more to her attic and commenced her toilet. It was soon made, and she stood before the glass wondering at her own image there in its unwonted array, and striving in vain to connect the blonde veil and the orange-blossoms in her bonnet with her real self. She felt as if she were looking at a well-executed photograph of "a bride."

"We're ready, we're ready, Miss Scott," cried two young voices behind her; "and the fly hast just turned the corner of the square;" and there stood the two young bridemaids, looking very nicely, in spite of their furbished-up costume. Edith kissed them, and told them to go down-stairs; she heard the fly drawing up before the door; and she wanted to kneel down by the side of the little bed she would never occupy again, just for one minute, to say, "Thank God for the past—O God! bless the time to come."

In less than two minutes she was down-stairs, and Philip stood in the hall, talking to the young ladies, who were secretly taking note of the bridegroom's appearance; then, without further delay, he handed in his bride and her attendants, and the fly-man cracked his whip, and set off at a galloping pace for the chapel where the ceremony was to take place. They were soon there, all too soon for Edith, who was beginning to feel very nervous; and when she was led into the vestry, she scarcely knew what she was saying or doing, and she scarcely recognized Miss Wilson, who hurried in to see if she could be of any use to the unbefriended bride, and her child bridemaids. Edith felt very grateful to her: she could render no real service; but she was pleased to have a kind, motherly friend at her side, on this solemn and memorable occasion; and when they went back into the chapel, Miss Wilson accompanied them, and stood behind the bride, as though she formed one of the wedding-party.

There were several persons in the chapel; but Edith saw no one. The service commenced; the words of the contract were duly pronounced, the wedding-ring was placed according to custom, a fervent beautiful prayer and a brief address were given, and Edith was startled by the minister shaking hands with her, and saying, "Allow me to congratulate you, Mrs. Proctor."

And then they went back to Falkner-square; and by that time Mr. and Mrs. Glynn had made their appearance, and the bridal party were received very graciously, and lunch was spread in the dining-room, expressly on their account; though if cook had not been kind and considerate, earlier in the day, Edith would certainly have been married before breakfast, by which I mean the real matutinal breakfast, and not the conventional *déjeûner*, which is after all the lunch, at which people drink tea and coffee, and wine, and eat chicken and tongue, and tarts, and sweetmeats, and everything else that is good to taste and goodly to the eye.

Mr. and Mrs. Glynn, as I said, received Philip and Edith most graciously, and pressed upon them wine, and meats, and cakes with profuse hospitality; and when Edith went up-

stairs for the last time Mrs. Glynn accompanied her, and helped to fold her wedding-dress, and lay it in the trunk; and while Edith made her toilet she gave her some good matronly advice, and again promised to buy all her books and stationery at the shop in Myrtle-place. And all this time Edith felt like one in a dream; and she was stupid and awkward in her movements, and made the ceremony of changing her dress last twice as long as was her wonted usage. O! if Mrs. Glynn would only go away and leave her to herself—it seemed so unnatural to see her there handing the wrong things, and folding her shawl in every fashion that was ridiculous.

But even that confused toilet came to an end, and Edith was ready to go down; she hoped Philip would not be out of all patience; but she found him listening quite meekly to one of Mr. Glynn's harangues upon Church government, the bench of bishops, and the bill for legalising marriage with a deceased wife's sister. So she ran into the schoolroom for one last glance! How odd the empty corners looked where her workbox and her desk had been so long! How forlorn her chair at the head of the long, bare table, where month after month she had sat teaching, lecturing, pouring out tea, and presiding at the middle-day dinner. And now it was all over, and a new life, new duties, new hopes, new fears, and new joys lay before her.

By-and-by the fly came that was to take Edith's properties to Myrtle-place. She and her husband were not going in it —they had planned to walk down to the landing-stage, and then to take the steamer to New Brighton, dining and drinking tea at the inn, and coming home to Myrtle-place in the evening. A bridal tour was out of the question, for Philip had no assistant, save his young apprentice, and anything that might interfere with the business was not to be thought of. They had arranged beforehand to dispense with the pleasant trip that most people think to be indispensable; and Christmas Day had been chosen, because it was a holiday of itself, and there might be some degree of pleasure-taking, without any neglect of duty.

So at last "good-bye" was really said; the door of the Glynn's house was shut, and Philip, with his wife on his arm, stood on the pavement, ready to begin anew the journey of life. But ere they could pass the front of the house there came an old white satin slipper flying over their heads, and turning round they beheld cook at the top of the area steps, wishing them all the good luck in the world, and the little girls at the dining-room windows, kissing their hands, and flourishing their pocket-handkerchiefs quite ecstatically.

In three minutes more Philip and Edith were walking down Chatham-street as demurely as if they had been married a year, instead of an hour; and some people were still on their way to church, and the merry bells were yet chiming. Best of all, the sun broke out, looming for a few minutes large and red through the mists, and then scattering the vapours and the clouds, and shining fuller and brighter, till, as they stood upon the hill above Rodney-street, the clear blue sky shone out above them, and the houses and churches stood up against the smiling azure in the brilliant, golden sunshine. When they reached the landing-stage, the Mersey was at full tide, and the waves danced merrily, and flags and streamers were flying from mast heads, and people were thronging down in their holiday clothes, going over the water to enjoy themselves. They were soon on the New Brighton shore, and when Philip had secured a private sitting-room and ordered dinner, they went out on the sands, which, owing to the late rains and the spring-tides, were firm enough to walk upon, without sinking over ankle.

And very sweet and pleasant was that walk by the blue rippling sea. The breeze blew freshly, but it was not cold for the season; the waves came lapping up round the Black Rock, and the sea-weed fringes floated idly on the receding waves, and then hung black and dripping from the rock; and on the Lancashire shore the shipping and the buildings rose up tall and white in the fair unclouded sunshine. And presently Divine service was over in the churches, and the merry bells began to ring again, sounding very sweet and musical in the calm distance, over the shining sea-water. And then

they went back to the inn to dine; but just before tea they came down again to the rock to watch the red sunset light die away over the Welsh hills, and the moon rise large and full-orbed over the heights on the Liverpool side of the river. And at last they walked down to the boat, and crossed what seemed to be a sea of molten silver, and presently the New Brighton shore faded away in the dim distance, and the spires of the great city—I *cannot* call Liverpool a town, it stands so queen-like on the broad salt Mersey—and the domes of the Custom-house and the Exchange showed clear and majestic in the soft cloudless moonlight. And Philip and Edith walked quietly up to Myrtle-place. They had spent a very happy day—the happiest day of their lives, they both said, as indeed all wedding-days should be.

And when they reached their own door in Myrtle-place, the merry Christmas bells were still ringing—"the merry, merry bells of Yule." To-day had been a day that would stand apart from all other days—a day of peaceful, full content, of sweet dreamy happiness, and fair visions of the future. To-morrow would begin a life of realities—the common work-a-day life of a work-a-day world.

CHAPTER IV.

HOUSEWIFERY.

It was a pretty sight to see Edith next day inspecting her new domain, and arranging matters according to her taste. Philip had made no mistake when he averred that the house would look altogether different when once it owned Edith as its mistress; for indeed poor Matty, though she had done her very best, had notions quite peculiar to herself; and her ideas of ornament and elegance were perfectly startling when the effect was viewed for the first time. And so it fell out that Edith found it necessary to make many alterations, and the whole morning was spent in making everything look to the

best advantage, with interludes of running into the kitchen to see that the giblet pie for dinner was not burning in the oven; and when Philip came in from the shop, where he had been busy for several hours, he hardly knew the rooms, which had cost him so much thought and trouble, and given him, after all, such small satisfaction for his pains. He could not describe the difference; he could not say in what the charm consisted; he only knew that his sitting-room wore an air of cheerfulness, and almost luxurious comfort, that it had never known before; and that his drawing-room, with its cheap chairs, its second-hand centre table—rather the worse for wear—and the old-fashioned cabinet—one of his few inherited possessions—looked as elegant and pretty as though three times their real value had been expended in their purchase; and he perceived at once that his little wife possessed that invaluable *savoir-faire*, without which a woman must ever fail in her domestic policy—in short, that she was what our American friends expressively term a "woman of faculty."

Now this "faculty" is in some measure, I doubt not, an inherent gift; but it may be induced to grow in soils where there are no self-sown faculty seeds, and it may be cultivated where it naturally exists, so as to bring it to most marvellous perfection. Little girls may very early be taught the secret of making home the happiest, cosiest, bonniest place in all the world; and that not by making them small cooks, and precocious kitchen-maids—though every woman ought to count cooking and the tasteful arrangement of rooms among her accomplishments; but by training them to be industrious, thoughtful, quick, and yet gentle in action, and, above all, unselfish; for she who thinks first of herself and of her trouble, and afterwards of others and their requirements, will never succeed in making her home that which it ought to be.

I think our grandmothers made one mistake, and we, the grown women of the present day, have made another. Our dear, good grandmammas studied the cookery-book with a continuous zeal and reverence, very nearly equal to that with which all persons, both men and women, should study Holy Scripture. They spent hours upon hours, and ruined their

eyes, in making invisible darns; and their pride was in old transparent china, mahogany polished with abundance of "elbow-grease," superb pickles, and super-excellent preserves. And the men of that generation—our respected grandpapas and great uncles—were, for the most part, satisfied with their wives and sisters: but these things are changed now; and the men of the present day require something beyond sempstresses and cooks for the beatification of their firesides; and our amiable complaisant sex, eager, I suppose, to meet their wishes, have now almost ignored the culinary art, and would be shocked at the bare idea of doing a little clear-starching, or making a set of shirts in the old orthodox fashion. So they dance, and dress, and draw in every possible style, from oil-painting down to atrocious black, very black, shiny lead performances; they play and they sing; they read novels and, it may be, works classical, philosophical, and theological; they study several living languages, and not unfrequently a dead one too; and they make paper flowers, leather flowers, wax flowers, and toil like serfs when a bazaar is in prospect; to say nothing of botany, geology, ethnology, chemistry, and other trifles, alike agreeable and improving.

And in the meantime the servants hold a perpetual Saturnalia in the kitchen; stores diminish with miraculous rapidity, shirts are buttonless, socks become patent ventilators of those extremities which are more comfortable warm than cold; watery soups, tough stews and hashes, and under-done joints make their appearance at the family table; and the husband grumbles, looks reproachfully at the sweet fairy-like creature at the head of his board, who can't think why the servants are so careless and stupid, and finally growing wearied with repeated failures, and finding that coaxing and scolding are alike ineffectual, takes to dining out. Then the injured wife remonstrates and complains of desertion; then the offended husband, laying his hand on the outraged organ of gustativeness, recriminates; charge provokes charge; words unkind and cutting sarcasms are uttered on both sides, and there is an end to connubial felicity. So fades the sweet vision of many a fair bride and newly-wedded lover. What

then? Are we to sell our pianos, and buy washing-machines? must we forswear French literature for the sake of French cookery? must we return to those good old times, when—as it is said, only one cannot quite believe it—women even in the upper classes of society read only their Bibles, the Week's Preparation, the Cookery Book, and sometimes "The Whole Duty of Man," or by way of variety one of Blair's sermons on the Sunday evening? By no means: there is time for the ornamental as well as the useful; and that woman is not the best wife whose whole soul is in stew-pans and store-closets; but she who takes care that her husband's table shall be wholesomely and daintily served, and is yet quite ready to discuss with him the day's leader in the *Times*, to sing and play for his entertainment in the evening, or to read with him the "Idylls of the King," or the last number of his favourite magazine; or, if he be tired and ruffled, and perhaps a little cross, with his eight, ten, or twelve hours' encounter with a rough, antagonistic world, to soothe him with her pretty ways and gentle pleasant talk, and to charm away, by those spells which all good, true women know how to employ, the cloud on the brow, the irritation from the temper, and the gloom from the mind.

But you will ask, are the two compatible? Can women be good housewives, and at the same time elegant scholars and accomplished members of society? A thousand times YES. Try it, you young ladies from fifteen and upwards, and you will certainly meet your reward. She who can construe a book of Virgil, or translate Dante or Goethe, or render Mendelssohn effectively, or teach Art to rival Nature on the glowing canvas, or enjoy to the full Tennyson's verse, or Macaulay's or De Quincey's prose, certainly ought to be able to make the lightest pastry and the most savoury soup; to arrange her rooms with that exquisite taste and skill which know how to combine separate trifles into one harmonious whole; and to dress with simple elegance, and, above all things, her step should be the lightest, her touch the tenderest, her forethought the most complete in the chamber of sickness.

Surely the mind that can grasp Latin syntax, and spondees, and dactyls, and appreciate the delights of our glorious English literature must be adequate to the performance, or at least the regulation, of common household duties. "*Common?*" Ah! there lies the mischief; that such occupations are common is, I am afraid, one of the principal reasons why they are so much neglected and despised. Young ladies well-read and accomplished think housewifery beneath them; it is vulgar, unintellectual, and best left to the homely and uncultivated. But I deny that housewifery is unintellectual: to keep house well, to govern one's domestic kingdom wisely and successfully, requires no common talent, no small powers of mind, no trifling effort of thought, memory, and philosophical reflection. And I feel quite sure that those who cultivate literature or the fine arts at the expense of more paramount duties are really only *dabblers* in the great world of letters—would-be artists and amateurs, whose pretensions shrink away into contemptible nothingness by reason of sheer shallowness whenever they are brought into contact with actual worth and great attainments.

And all this homily has sprung out of Mrs. Philip Proctor's comfortable sitting-room, and elegant drawing-room; and now let us return to her, as she rushes up to her room, to change her dress and smooth her curls, before she meets her husband at the dinner-table. She has been married too short a time, and is, moreover, too right-minded, to say in excuse for *déshabille*, "O! it is only my husband!" How *can* a woman ever say such a thing? Who in the wide world ought she to dress for, if not for her husband? And now she comes down, triumphantly leads Philip to view the result of her morning's labour, and then she sits down with him to dinner, only they two, for the apprentice has a holiday, and that is the reason why Mr. Proctor has been so busy in the shop.

I am afraid you think this marriage of Philip and Edith a very prosaic affair; such a wedding will only excite your contemptuous pity; no jewels, no wedding breakfast, no wedding tour; not even one day's holiday—for Christmas Day, on which the marriage took place, is a holiday of itself, and was chosen

precisely on that account, that business might not be interfered with at all.

"And you have been very busy all the morning, dear?" said Edith, when the cloth was drawn, and she and her husband had brought their chairs together close to the fire. "Have you taken heaps of money?"

"No, indeed! I have only taken nine and sixpence. My business was principally to hunt through a great number of parcels, in search of a memorandum book that was sent me as a pattern; and the order has to go in on New Year's-day. That stupid Robert has mislaid it somehow; or else lost it altogether."

"Philip, I do not think you like that poor boy?"

"No, darling, I do not; he does not speak the truth, and he is very idle when my back is turned; neither will you like him on other accounts—his manners are very unpleasing; if he is at all out of temper, he is surly, and inclined to be saucy. I am glad, dear, I held out against his boarding with us; dinner is the only meal he takes with us, for it cuts into the busy part of the day too much if he goes home to dine at Old Swan, where his friends live."

"Of course you will make him look for the memorandum-book to-morrow?"

"I hope, dear, I shall find it myself this afternoon; for the order ought to be in hand to-night; it will never do to be unpunctual."

"No, certainly not; but, Philip, can I not help you in your search? I have nothing to do before tea-time, and it will be rather dreary sitting alone here, just catching a glimpse of you now and then through that half-glass door."

"Well, darling, you may come into the shop, if you like, for there will be very few customers to serve; the day after Christmas Day is always as slack as any in the year. But you will be cold."

"No colder than you will be; besides, there is the stove; the shop ought to be tolerably warm. And, Philip dear, you see just now, while everything is new, and I have neither making nor mending in hand, I should like to get to know

something about the business. If that apprentice is not to be trusted, it is quite as well that I, as well as yourself, should know what is going on; and then, if you were a little poorly and very much tired, I could just see to things, you know. Besides, your business is such a pretty one. I quite long to be fingering those packets of tinted note-paper. Don't you think, in our position, it is best the wife should be able to assist her husband, if necessary—at least, to be qualified to act in any emergency?"

"You are the best little thing, Edith. Well, I have no objection to your knowing all about the business; that clear, methodical mind of yours will be an incalculable advantage; but mind, I will never consent to your serving a customer. It shall not be said that I took you from your luxurious home to put you behind the counter."

"Now, Philip!" cried Edith, a cloud coming over her bright face, "why will you be so vexatious? That luxurious home, as you call it, was not my home at all. I was only a hireling, liable at any time to be discharged, and sent adrift. This dear, snug little nest is already a thousand times dearer to me than that splendid house in Falkner-square: there I was servant, here I am mistress. O Philip, it was very good of you to take me to your heart—me, a poor desolate orphan—I was quite alone in the world, and poor in every sense; and now I am rich—O how rich!"

"My darling," said Philip, looking tenderly into the soft brown eyes that were filled with happy tears, "may your sweet trust never be shaken; may I make you as happy as you deserve to be."

Something like a passing cloud swept over Edith's expressive face: she remembered what Miss Wilson had said, that she would never be a happy wife while she did not love her Saviour; and she knew quite well that her friend's words were truth; for at any moment death might come, and put asunder those whom God had joined together, and then, if they were no Christians, what would become of the sweet happiness that even now, from its intensity, made her tremble for its duration? What, after all, was the worth of love that could

never o'ersweep the grave? How unsubstantial the union of hearts that must part for ever at the chill touch of the King of Terrors!

She thought she would speak of this to her husband; so, with a little hesitation, she said, "Philip, dear, I have been thinking—"

"What have you been thinking, my pet? Let me hear my little wife's sage reflections."

"I have been thinking, dear—now pray don't think me a silly girl—that neither you nor I love God as we ought to do."

"My dearest, who does? We are not singular in that respect."

"No, I know. But we are not Christians; we are not among God's professing people."

"You mean we are not members of the church; do you know, Edith, I think that is not of very material consequence? I know many church-members, who might just as well be out of the church as in it; better too, for then they would bring no discredit upon religion. I should be very sorry to undertake a character which I could not fully and sincerely carry out."

"O yes, surely, one would wish of course to be quite sincere, and very much in earnest about one's Christianity; but then, Philip, because other people are inconsistent, it does not follow that we must be the same. It seems to me that their shortcomings and mistakes are in that sense nothing to us, since for ourselves alone we shall have to answer in the great day of the Lord. There are many professors whom I should not at all wish to resemble; still that does not, or ought not, to hinder me from making a profession."

"My dear love! if you wish to do so, if you feel called upon to join the church, do not hesitate; never mind me; satisfy your own conscience; though at the same time, I must say, I think you are quite good enough as you are."

But Edith shrank back. "O! no, Philip, not without you; indeed, indeed, I could not do anything of the kind without you. I could not bear to stay for the ordinance of

the Lord's Supper while you went away; and then, I am not fit! I may be good enough to please you, my dear husband, in my outward conduct; but that is not enough. My heart is not right towards God."

"My dear one, do not grieve yourself so! What a tender little conscience it is! You know, love, even the best of us must count himself an 'unprofitable servant.'"

"Ah! the best of us! But it is when we have done *all* that we are to call ourselves unprofitable servants—I am not a servant at all!"

"My dear Edith, I cannot bear to hear you speak so humbly of yourself. You are low-spirited, love; let us choose another subject of conversation, and in the meantime let us do our duty to the utmost, and trust to God's mercy for the rest."

And just then the little bell that hung on the shop-door tinkled, and through the glass panes they saw a customer enter. With one fervent kiss, Philip hurried away, rather glad—nay, very glad at heart—to find a reasonable excuse for changing the current of his thoughts, as well as the subject matter of discourse.

But Edith lingered over the fire with folded hands and sad, thoughtful eyes. It pained her to think that on the very day after her marriage her cheeks should be wet with sorrowful tears, and yet she could not help it. And then again, the first serious conversation she had held with her husband had shown her how little he understood or sympathized with feelings that were gradually growing to be the deepest and most sacred emotions of her heart. She tried to put these thoughts away; and in watching the proceedings of her husband and his customer, who seemed to be looking over half the books in the shop, she really forgot for the time her anxieties and regrets.

Then, when the customer went away, with a neat little packet, just eighteen-pence worth, under his arm, she ventured to join Philip, who was about to re-commence his hunt for the missing memorandum-book. The search at last proved successful; and then Edith began to make fresh arrangements in the fancy stationery department, and her

efforts were quite as successful as those she had put forth in her own especial territories. Philip promised her that she should really have the superintendence of that branch of his business; and he warned her that her office would be no sinecure when Valentine's-day drew near.

And so the afternoon and evening passed away, and things continued, as Philip said, "terribly slack;" for when the shutters were up, and he and Edith had carried the day's receipts into the little parlour, they found one pound three shillings and sixpence in the till; and five shillings were for postage-stamps—a most unprofitable article of commerce to stationers and booksellers, who obligingly take the trouble of dispensing Queen's-heads at the usual charge in order to oblige their customers, and very likely in the hope that something else may take the fancy of the stamp purchaser, the sale of which brings in a decent little profit.

And like this first day of their new life were many others that succeeded—calm, quiet, happy days, that Edith in after years looked back upon with an inexpressible tenderness and yearning. She never stood behind the counter, for Philip would never permit that; but she was very useful in many ways, and certainly her little household was ordered to perfection; and at night when business was over, she generally had something that she had been wanting all day to read to him. And the time glided by, and the daylight lasted longer, and people who take tea at the good old-fashioned hour of five or half-past could now take that refreshing meal without the aid of gas or candle. Spring was coming, with her flowers, and sunshine, and songs of birds. It would bring so much that was fair, and good, and charming; but would it bring more customers to Philip's neat little shop? for they were sadly lacking, while everything else was in a comfortable state of plenitude.

CHAPTER V.

THE HAUGHTONS.

And all this time Philip and Edith heard nothing of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Haughton; the promised wedding-cards had never arrived, and the Proctors did not even know in what part of Liverpool Mr. Haughton and his bride were located; and Philip justly concluded that his old friend had forgotten all about him, or perhaps, upon cool reflection, had decided that a young man who kept a stationer's shop and was married to a *ci-devant* governess could not possibly be included in their visiting list. It was seldom that Philip thought about it at all; for, excepting certain anxieties touching the dullness of his trade, he was most thoroughly contented, and far too happy to trouble himself about the neglect of those who probably considered themselves his superiors. And Edith secretly rejoiced: she was extremely shy by nature, though people never guessed it; she always seemed so calm and self-possessed; and the idea of visiting and being visited by the superb Miss Clive, in her new character as Mrs. Haughton, absolutely set all her nerves quivering. She knew that, in external circumstances, there could be nothing in common between them, and she did not like to be patronized—"taken up," as people would say—by the rich and fashionable Mrs. Haughton. Moreover, whenever she thought of these people she experienced one of those unaccountable presentiments to which certain natures are more or less liable: she felt that they were better as they were; that any intimacy with Edwin Haughton and his bride would tend to evil, not to good. She did not reason about it in any way; she only shrank from the acquaintance as from the first possible foreshadows of an impending misfortune. However, as weeks passed on and nothing was heard of the Haughtons, Edith ceased to think

of them; and at last she laughed at herself for the nervous dread which had made her so fearful of a visitation that was never likely to take place.

One fine morning early in April, Edith was very busy in her neat little kitchen, with her sleeves well tucked up and a large cooking-apron carefully pinned over her neat print dress. It was past twelve o'clock, and she was rather behindhand with the dinner, she thought; so she was totally occupied with something in a stew-pan, which could not safely be entrusted to Matty, whose culinary genius was of the most eccentric order, inasmuch as her roasts were invariably underdone, her boiled meats overdone, and her stews and hashes of a fine leathery consistency. Still Matty was a good girl and did her best, and thought five pounds a-year very comfortable wages.

While Edith concocted her rabbit-stew very delicately, Matty was busy in the drawing-room cleaning the windows to the tune of "Mourir pour la Patrie," which had just then become extremely popular with the street brass-bands who infested the neighbourhood of Myrtle-place. Matty could clean grandly, albeit her cooking was, to say the least of it, exasperating, and her ideas as to elegance and ornament perfectly unique.

Just as Edith congratulated herself that after all dinner would not be delayed, she was startled by a tremendous uproar, which suggested the pavement being torn up for a barricade outside, and the upper stories tumbling down-stairs inside the house. Ere she could imagine the cause of this extraordinary and unlooked-for disturbance; ere her mind had time to wonder whether Philip was quite safe, in rushed Matty, waving her dripping wash-leather in the highest excitement, "O! please, ma'am—please ma—am—O! I'm out of breath—*O my!*"

The last breathless exclamation was caused by a thundering rap at the private door, which made Edith drop her wooden spoon into the ashes. "What is the matter, Matty? Is the chimney on fire? are the engines come?" And Mrs. Proctor was quite pale with agitation.

"No, ma'am, no. O! but I must answer the door—not an engine, only a carriage-and-four, the horses all a-prancing, and the footman a-hanging on behind."

The truth rushed into Edith's mind straightway, and she desired Matty to put down the wet leather and tie on her clean apron, and make haste to the front door, and show any company who might have arrived into the drawing-room.

Matty obeyed commands with a soldierly celerity and address that did both mistress and maid credit, crying only as she left the kitchen—"O my! they're real quality; a coach-and-four, and there's my bowl of dirty water on the hotter-man, and the blacklead brush somewhere or 'nother."

Words that sounded appallingly enough to poor Edith; she was too young a housekeeper not to fidget herself about such little *contre-temps* as will occur sometimes in the best regulated families where there is only one maid-of-all-work, aged seventeen. The cooking-apron was quickly dismissed, the sleeves turned down, the print dress surveyed with an air both deprecatory and critical—would there be time to change it?

Then Matty came back with round sparkling eyes, and cards in her hand—"Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Haughton."

"O, ma'am, do go and put on your pretty blue silk, or your flounced barridge; such a grand lady, ma'am! she's got a satin dress on worth fifty pounds, I should say, and the loveliest shawl, and a long waving feather in her bonnet, and her voice is like little bells a-tinkling; and I just took out the bowl, and I hope they won't see the blacklead brush, for it is pretty well under the grate."

There was a little glass hanging up in the kitchen, and in it Mrs. Proctor contemplated, with no small dismay, her flushed face, which the fire had literally rouged from forehead to chin: was ever anything so unfortunate? And her hands—they were scorched and rough, and their delicacy was somewhat impaired, through contact with saucepan-lids, &c., &c.

In less than a minute, however, her better sense returned. Why should she put on a silk dress, and make a pretence

of being that which she was not? What if she were cooking her husband's dinner, was it not an honourable employment or a young matron in her circumstances? Why go up stairs and play the fine lady, most probably exciting the derision of her visitors, and certainly incurring her own contempt? So she only took some hot water from the fountain, and washed her hands, and smoothed her rich brown curls, and added a pair of white frilled ruffles to her costume, and heroically prepared to meet the invasion—for such it seemed to her—as best she might.

No one would have imagined how Edith Proctor's heart sank within her as her hand touched the handle of her own drawing-room door, who saw her so calm and collected, receiving the greetings of Mr. and Mrs. Haughton, and making in return the usual preliminary inquiries after their health and general well-being. Greatly to her surprise the stately Isabel seized her hand as she sat down, and began with—"My dear Mrs. Proctor! you cannot think how I have been longing to pay this visit. And where is your husband? Mine is quite wild to see his old friend—his dear old friend, who saved his life when he was sinking in the river." This was news to Edith, and her face confessed as much. "What! you did not know it?" cried Mrs. Haughton. "Ah! the noble, generous man, risking his own life, and then saying nothing about it! Ah! I dare say, to a grand nature like his, it seems the simplest and most natural thing in the world to risk one's own life for one's friend."

"How was it?" asked Edith, her heart beating quickly at this unexpected testimony to her dear Philip's excellence.

"They were boys together, mere boys; and one day they went down to Eastham for pleasure. They could both swim a little, and only a little; but they fancied they could swim like Leander; and, after a long stroll in the woods, they resolve to try the water. They beat about a little, keeping near the shore, till at last growing bolder they struck out further into the stream, and there a strong ebb current met them and carried them out in spite of all their efforts. Further and further from land they drifted, for the current, sped by a

rising wind, flowed faster and stronger, and both felt that they were doomed, for there was not a boat in sight nor a creature to be seen on the shore. Suddenly there was a lull, and the two boys, taking advantage of it, strained every nerve to stem the tide, and they succeeded in getting into calm water once more. The rest was easy; but when your husband reached the shore he saw Edwin drifting back again into the open river; his strength had suddenly failed him, and a great wave sweeping down the channel had borne him back to destruction. There was no hope for him; his strength was quite gone; he could only faintly struggle with the choking waters, and resign himself to a fate that every moment seemed more and more inevitable. Philip Proctor saw how it was; and though he was exhausted with his own efforts, and though to return seemed certain death, he could not let his friend perish before his eyes without one effort to save him. So he turned his back on the haven of rest he had almost gained, and once more, with sadly diminished strength, prepared to breast the cold, treacherous waves. There was no great difficulty in reaching Edwin, for the wind and the stream bore him along without much exertion of his own, and when he came up with his friend, he was just sinking, though he had striven bravely for life. The sight of Philip reanimated him, and the sight of Edwin on the verge of perishing roused Philip to almost supernatural effort. There was a dreadful struggle—time after time they were beaten back by the angry current, and each time they felt colder, and fainter, and the chances of escape seemed nearly gone. However, in a lull of the breeze, they managed to reach the calmer water, and at last the shore was gained; but even in the moment of safety all was very nearly lost, for Philip's strength was just spent, and Edwin was insensible; twice, as they neared land, they were well-nigh swept away again into the raging stream, where they must perforce have perished immediately; but a good Providence watched over them, and brought them safely to the shore more dead than alive, but still snatched from the dreadful danger which had so nearly overwhelmed them."

Edith's cheeks were glowing now with exquisite pleasure; this tribute to her husband's goodness and heroism quite won her heart; and Isabel's large dark eyes were flashing through tears. It was evident that she was a woman of excitable temperament, and strong and almost passionate nature. Edith was drawn towards her in spite of herself.

"And you never heard this relation before?" asked Mrs. Haughton, as soon as her voice was steady again.

"No, indeed! I know Mr. Haughton and Philip were once very nearly drowned, when they were bathing together off Eastham; but I never knew that my husband"—O, how proudly Edith said "*my* husband," with such a complacent stress on the pronoun—"I never knew that he was the means of saving his friend's life; I really think, strange as it seems, that he must have forgotten the circumstance; for though he has spoken once or twice of his narrow escape at that time, he has never given any particulars, and in no way alluded to his own special share in the adventure."

"Perhaps he has forgotten it," said Mr. Haughton, "though I have not forgotten it, and never can. It is just like him; he never thought anything of his own heroism; at school he was just the same—if he did the best thing in the world, if he performed marvels of bravery and magnanimity, he never seemed to think he was doing more than any other lad would would have done in his place. Generosity and unselfishness come just as naturally to him, as the reverse qualities come to poor human nature in general."

"You see we ought to be friends," said Mrs. Haughton, earnestly. "I was quite annoyed when I found cards had not been sent to you, and we only came home last week. We have been in the south of France and in the Tyrol for a short time, that we might see the mountains in all their winter grandeur. So you perceive we have not lost much time in taking the initiative and coming to see you—Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, we received calls of ceremony—to-day I thankfully escaped, and came to visit my husband's dear old friend and his wife. But are we not to see Mr. Proctor?"

"I will send for him," said Edith—"would you very much

mind if I went for him myself? He does not like the servant to go into the shop, and he is sure to be there; besides Matty is not used to visitors, and she perverts messages in the most ingenious fashion."

So Edith tripped away to bring Philip; she was quite at ease now; and Philip, who had already discovered the fact of Mr. and Mrs. Haughton being in the house, had just given certain business directions, and was preparing to make his appearance.

"She is so charming," said Edith, as she pushed back the rich masses of Philip's dark wavy hair; "such a lovely creature, and so winning in her ways—nothing at all like what I thought she was, when I used to see her sometimes in Mrs. Glynn's drawing-room. Then she always seemed proud, and languid, and the least wee bit scornful. Now she is quite another person, so frank, so enthusiastic, so thoroughly engaging. And I like Mr. Haughton too."

And so, prattling away, Edith led her husband into the room; and the old friends met with a demonstrative cordiality that is rarely manifested among men, save by those who have been dear and familiar to each other in the days of boyhood. They were soon absorbed in reminiscences; and the young wives listened, well-pleased, and smiled at each other, and seemed strangely drawn together by the free, hearty converse of their husbands. At length it was time to go, and then Mrs. Haughton said, "But you must not suppose, Mrs. Proctor, that we came here *only* to pay a visit; we came for a specific purpose: we want you both to come and dine with us next Tuesday. We are to be great friends, you know, so the sooner we are acquainted with each other's little peculiarities the better."

Edith looked doubtfully at her husband; they had covenanted between themselves to refuse all invitations that would be likely to foster a spirit of discontent with their own little household, or to lead them into incidental expenses that would otherwise be avoided. Philip understood the glance. "I think, my dear," he said, "we must not disappoint our friends; we have not dined out since our marriage, and it is

our principle to visit only in a very quiet way, and that but seldom; still this is a case that calls for an exception. Edwin Haughton is my old friend, and he earnestly wishes his wife and my wife to be as good, true friends as we have been, and are to be, I hope. So I think, Edith, we must make up our minds to a little dissipation."

"O, thank you, thank you!" cried the impulsive Isabel; "you looked so dreadfully and uncompromisingly virtuous, that I was beginning to think what wiles I had better practise in order to soften your flinty heart. We shall be very quiet, I assure you; we shall only have my uncle and my cousin Estelle, whom we have brought back from Paris, and one or two others—nothing of a party; only two or three nice, pleasant, conversible people. And you must try my new piano, Mrs. Proctor; it is said to be a magnificent instrument: and could we not practise some duetts together? Estelle never plays duetts; indeed, she plays nothing but the accompaniments to her songs, and those she more than half improvises: you will be astonished at her singing; but I do not know if you will like it; it is strange, wild, most unearthly, fitful, and yet sometimes so thrilling, that it makes me feel really ill."

The idea of music quite fired Edith: she had scarcely touched a piano since her marriage; and no one but herself knew how great had been the privation: no one knew how her soul had ached for melody; how she had played her favourite airs on the table, humming them the while; how tenderly she had turned over her unused music-books, and wished she had ever such an old tin-kettle of a pianoforte: and Matty, who once saw her turning over the leaves of her choicest pieces, deeply lamented her mistress's want of "an instrument," as she vaguely called a piano, and suggested, as cheapness was an object, that a barrel-organ should be purchased, "that would play a good many pretty tunes, and not be so much trouble as one of them things that wanted to be fingered before they'd speak out."

"So Edith and Philip accepted the invitation, and Mr. and Mrs. Haughton departed; and Edith, watching their departure

from her drawing-room window, perceived that Matty had drawn somewhat on her imagination, for the four prancing steeds dwindled into two handsome carriage-horses, who behaved themselves with all due sobriety and discretion.

"Well, love! have we done right?" was Philip's first speech when he returned from handing Mrs. Haughton to her carriage. "I think we could not have decided otherwise?"

"No," said Edith, slowly, "I suppose not; and yet we made so many resolves not to begin the kind of visiting that would lead us into unnecessary expenses, that I feel rather weak, and too easily swayed, for I do want to go, and that is the truth."

"But then, my darling, the Haughtons must not be confounded with people in general; their friendship is evidently sincere, for if they did not really wish to be intimate they would not have taken the trouble to seek us out; they must like us for ourselves, for we possess nothing that can at all attract them in any other way; and really, dear, one may shut one's self out from society till one becomes a mere cabbage! Now we have only drunk tea out twice since we were married, and we have had no one to spend the evening with us except Miss Wilson and little Jenny Moore; I really believe a little, just a little society will be for our benefit."

"And in the present instance it will be no expense," said Edith: "my blue silk will look very well, I have only worn it twice; I shall merely want a new pair of gloves."

"Very well; that is happily settled. And now, Edie, what about dinner? I cannot dine upon the prospect of next Tuesday's entertainment, and I want to go into Castle-street this afternoon."

Edith flew to the kitchen; she had quite forgotten her cooking. Alas! dire disaster had befallen; the potato-saucepan had reeled tipsily off the hob and fallen into the fire. So they had to dine upon pudding and cheese, the stew being, as the apprentice gravely told Matty, "*non est inventus.*"

"And sure," cried Matty, "it was the grand people as

brought the ill-luck and took away the missis, and flustered me till I didn't know which was my fingers and which was my thumbs."

CHAPTER VI.

REDCLIFFE HOUSE.

THE morning of the day when Edith and Philip were to dine with their friends arrived, and it seemed quite an event in the little household that had known so few changes since its first establishment. It was altogether a day of events, for, by the morning's post, Philip received a letter from one of the deacons of the chapel which they usually attended, asking him on what terms he would be willing to undertake certain printing for the use of the schools and the other religious institutions connected with the place. And Philip was only too glad to send in a moderate estimate, pledging himself, at the same time, to execute any work entrusted to him with the utmost neatness, diligence, and punctuality; for so far his business was by no means flourishing, and when his quarter's accounts were made out, and his own liabilities clearly defined, the result was not at all satisfactory. He was scarcely paying his way, and the slightest increase of expense would produce a deficiency that might be the commencement of grievous entanglements and inextricable difficulties. So it quite revived Philip's spirits to find a new branch of his trade opening before him, and he resolved to strain every nerve in order to accomplish his task, should it be committed to his care. And he and Edith talked it over together, and planned many little improvements in the shop and in the house, as soon as that capricious dame Fortune should show herself to be in a propitious mood.

The second event of the day was by no means so exhilarating. Philip had occasion to look for some publishers' lists, and not finding what he sought, he proceeded to rummage his

waste-paper depôt, for as the list required was rather out of date, it was quite possible that it might have been carried away with other loose scraps. At first he thought of sending Robert, for he was at the moment extremely busy; but remembering the good old axiom, that those are best served who serve themselves, he determined to go and look for himself, his apprentice's carelessness in overlooking matters being unfortunately too patent to admit of a reasonable hope of his searching with anything like success. Philip, however, compromised the matter by sending Edith, and he did so in Robert's hearing, who immediately, and with the utmost eagerness, volunteered to go in her stead, observing that the room where the waste-papers were kept was rather dusty, and Mrs. Proctor would be sure to dirty her hands.

"Never mind my hands," said Edith, good-humouredly; "they will wash. You have those sheets to arrange, and, as Mr. Proctor wishes it, I prefer going myself." With a strange and very unusual pertinacity, Robert again proffered his services, but Edith firmly persisted in doing that which her husband required, to the very evident discomfiture of the apprentice.

Greatly wondering at his unaccountable perturbation, Edith set off to the room where her search was to be made. Dusty enough it was truly, but she was not one to be daunted at a little general griminess; so, deftly tucking up her dress, and cheerfully resolving to victimize her hands for the nonce, she plunged bravely into the mass of rubbish before her.

She drew them out again, as if they had been burnt; for at the bottom of the box something far more substantial than mere waste-paper met her grasp; something smooth, and solid and compact; and it flashed upon her mind at once, that she had stumbled upon an unpleasant discovery. Out came a large packet of the best blue-wove Bath post; it was somewhat damaged, water having been spilled on it so freely as to saturate three or four of the outer quires, and of course to render them quite unsaleable; the remainder of the paper was only slightly injured, and yet sufficiently so to interfere

with its value as stock—it could only be sold as "outsides," or defective goods. The next thing was a bundle of memorandum-books and a school Atlas tied together, spoiled as the paper had been. Then came several packets of the best envelopes, and half a ream of black-edged note paper, and a little "Compendium of Natural History," that had been ordered by Mrs. Glynn, and most strangely missed from the counter, on the very day of the arrival of the London parcel. It had been sought for everywhere; and at length Robert suggested that it must have been stolen by some dishonest person coming into the shop as a customer. And this seeming to be the only possible explanation of its extraordinary disappearance, no more was said about it, and another copy was ordered in place of that which was lost.

And now here was the book itself completely spoiled and defaced; it had been deluged with water, the leaves were still damp, and the covers were thickly spotted with mould and mildew. And here were other things in the same condition, and in the very place where one would least have wished or expected to find them. They were certainly in the waste-paper box for purposes of concealment. Now, then, was explained Robert's visible disquietude at the idea of any person besides himself making search among the loose papers; for of course it was he who had hidden there the spoiled articles, after he had by his own carelessness caused the mischief. Gathering up all the damaged property, Edith hurried back into the house. The chamber where she had been searching was in a detached portion of the building, and over the room where the printing was generally carried on. She laid them all on the sitting-room table, and summoned Philip from the shop.

Great was his astonishment at beholding the heap of ruined paper and books which Edith, without speaking, presented to his view. "Why! what!" he cried, hurriedly, "what are these, my dear? where do they come from? Why, here is positively Mrs. Glynn's 'Compendium,' that we thought was stolen! Surely it has been in the cistern!"

"They were in the waste-paper box," said Edith, gravely. "I was looking for the list you require, when I found these at the bottom, under all the scraps and rubbish."

"But who can have put them there? who has spoiled them in this way? There has been trickery as well as carelessness."

"Robert was particularly annoyed when I persisted in making the search myself. He wanted to save me the trouble. He tried to deter me by saying how very dirty the place was."

"O! of course it is he. I will call him in; there is no one in the shop."

And Robert being called in, loitered a moment to finish some arrangement of the goods in the window, and then came into the sitting-room with an air of perfect composure, which, however, changed quickly into astonishment that was either perfectly natural, or else a piece of most consummate acting. Neither Philip nor Edith could at all tell which it might be. "The Compendium!" he exclaimed, stepping hastily forwards, and taking it into his hands—"why, it is quite wet: it must have been in the river. And all this paper in the same state! where has it been, sir?"

"I called you to ask you that question," replied Philip, rather sternly; "or rather I wish to know how it came to be in this state, for I suppose you, and only you, can tell me?"

"*I* tell you, sir!" indeed I cannot. I am as ignorant as yourself. Where did you find it?"

"Mrs. Proctor found it; but really, Robert, it is absurd of you to ask me where, for it must have been of your putting. You have had an accident, or you have been unpardonably careless; but tell me the truth, and for this time I overlook the fault: only remember it must not happen again; you must be more particular, and you must not resort to tricks to hide your errors, or we shall fall out very seriously."

"Really, sir, Mr. Proctor," said the apprentice, hotly, "you are speaking very strangely. Did I not say I knew nothing about this mysterious business? I missed the Bath post a fortnight ago; but I thought you had taken it, and I always

forgot to ask you about it. Indeed, sir, I have no idea how these things were spoiled, nor where you, or rather Mrs. Proctor, found them."

"Is it possible?" said Philip, quite amazed at Robert's air of injured innocence. "If you did not do the mischief, *who did?* I did not, most certainly, and I need not hide my own misdeeds from myself; and as for Mrs. Proctor, she was quite startled when she made the discovery. If you are innocent, who is guilty?"

"I cannot tell," replied Robert, sullenly. "I have said I know nothing about it, and I shall not say any more for anybody. I see *you* don't believe me, Mrs. Proctor." And he turned towards Edith, and absolutely glared at her in his anger. There was a look of malevolence in his face that really frightened her; and she looked at Philip to see if he would interfere. But Philip had not seen the malignant glance; and when Edith met Robert's gaze again, the furious and evil aspect was gone. He was sullen indeed, as was his wont when in any way displeased; but the expression that had so startled her had so entirely disappeared that she tried to persuade herself it had been a mere delusion of her own imagination.

Of course there was no more to be said; Robert steadily and indignantly denied the allegation, and there really was no actual and absolute proof of his having been concerned in the mischief; and yet, if he were innocent, who could be guilty? And the more Mr. and Mrs. Proctor talked over the affair, the more certain it seemed that the apprentice, and he only, had caused the damage. It made them both extremely uncomfortable, and Philip, who had never yet left his business for a single afternoon, felt half inclined to give up his engagement with the Haughtons, and send Edith alone to dine and spend the evening with their friends. But Edith steadily refused to pay the visit without her husband, and so, after a short debate, Philip concluded to accompany his wife.

When the time came, Edith went up-stairs to dress, and Matty officiated as lady's maid; and very pleased was the kindly little damsel, when her mistress at last stood

before the glass in full array. Nor was Edith herself ill-pleased with her own reflection. A very fair picture she made, with her long, smooth, sunny curls, her fresh clear complexion, and her soft brown eyes, which Philip always said were like a King Charles spaniel's.

And her blue silk fitted her admirably, and her solitary lace collar and cuffs showed to advantage; and when Philip saw her, he looked and admired, and observed that she was dressed elegantly and yet quite simply, as it behoved his wife to dress; and he was sure Isabel Haughton, in all her bridal splendour, would not outshine his own modestly-attired Edith.

It was a fine afternoon, and so Mr. and Mrs. Proctor set out to walk to West Derby, where the Haughtons lived; it was a long way certainly; but the West Derby-road was more rural then than it is now. There were few houses past the Necropolis; Tuebrook was a lonely-looking village; and between the aristocratic precincts of West Derby, and the humble district of Old Swan, were only green lanes, with here and there a snug pretty cottage, and overhanging trees, and pleasant pasture meadows; for the debateable regions of Stoneycroft were entirely non-existent.

And along Rocky-lane Philip and Edith walked arm-in-arm, thinking how pleasant it was to be taking a walk together in broad daylight; for this was their first walk since their wedding-day, save only short constitutionals after the shop was closed in the evening, and an occasional extension of ramble, by taking the furthest and most round-about way home from chapel on Sunday morning. And Philip was very proud of his sweet-looking young wife; and the sun shone so pleasantly, the trees and hedges were so full of bud, and the birds sang, or rather chirped, so merrily, that they congratulated themselves again and again on the fine afternoon, which allowed them the unusual luxury of a long walk; whereas, had it rained, they must have hired a fly at a ruinous expense, or else have committed themselves, and Edith's one handsome dress, that was to last for seven years, to the tender mercies of a crowded omnibus.

They were not at all tired when they reached Redcliffe House. It was quite a mansion, standing in its own grounds; the carriage-drive was broad and beautifully kept, the lawn was mown to perfect evenness; and many choice shrubs were just bursting into leaf, and, blending with the evergreens, made the whole place look as brightly verdant as though summer had actually commenced her reign.

"How lovely!" said Edith, pausing to admire a noble cedar, whose dark boughs swept the turf—"and, O Philip! that is a Wistaria!—what a sight it will be in another week or two! I wish we had a garden: do you know, I think I will get some mignonette boxes, they will not cost much—may I, dear?"

"Of course you may, Edith! Never mind, my love, if I have my health, and if I have anything like good fortune in my business, the day may come when we shall have a house and grounds more beautiful than these."

"Ah! I dare say," returned Edith, gaily, "I shall be a very grand lady one of these days;" and then more seriously—"but, Philip dear, I shall never be happier than I am now. If, in time to come, God should so bless our efforts that we may be able to live in the country, and to enjoy such luxuries as those that are around us here, it will be very pleasant, and our hearts must be very grateful to Him from whom the blessing comes; but, dear, I think I shall never, never love any home like our dear little nest in Myrtle-place—my first home, I may call it, for I remember very little of the home of my childhood—it will always be so very dear to me, because there I first lived with you; there I was a happy bride, and there I am a happier wife, and every day makes me only more fully contented with my lot; and there I should like to live a long while yet; I almost think I should like to die there."

"Edith! you absurd child, actually there are tears in your eyes; pray do not wear that sentimental air, or Edwin and his wife will imagine that I am a horrible tyrant, blighting your young life, and breaking your heart by slow degrees. Come, look up, birdie; there is the beauteous Isabel at the

window, and she sees us; if you don't take care she will call you 'that poor Mrs. Proctor.'"

"Poor indeed!" said Edith, tossing back her curls, and laughing—"I should like to hear any one call me 'poor Mrs. Proctor!' Why, I am quite as rich as Mrs. Haughton, though I may not have my purse so full, or so many servants at my command, or a house so grand, or—O! I am tired of enumerating the various grandeurs that I have not, and care nothing about: I would not change with her."

By this time the hall door was thrown open, and Mrs. Haughton herself advanced to meet them. And again Edith was fairly taken captive, Isabel was so winning, so truly kind, and seemed so unconscious of her wonderful beauty and grace. She conducted Edith to her own room—a room which seemed, to Mrs. Proctor's simple imagination, a fitting sleeping-chamber for Queen Victoria herself—such a toilet, such exquisite and costly ornaments, jewelled tazzas richly cut, and coloured bottles for perfume, inlaid trays for trifles of all sorts! Such drapery, such mirrors, such a carpet! It seemed more like a web of forest moss, interwoven with fairest exotics, than the produce of any mortal loom. Then there was the dressing-room and the boudoir—both marvels of taste and luxurious comfort. And Edith thought of her own scantily-furnished room at home; and there was no pang of envy as she involuntarily compared its humble appointments with these bowers of beauty and elegance.

The dinner was admirably served, and the party was even smaller than they had expected, for only Isabel's uncle, Mr. John Clive, and her cousin, Estelle Drummond, were present besides themselves. After dinner, the gentlemen lingered long over their wine, and Edith thought Philip would never make his appearance in the drawing-room. He came at length, at the first sound of the piano, for Miss Drummond was going to sing. She sat down without any music, and commenced a strange fitful prelude in a minor key; which presently glided into a wild, weird melody, singularly beautiful, and unlike anything Edith had ever heard before. Then the accompaniment changed to a regular even measure, like

the rocking of a boat on troubled waves, and then the magnificent voice of the songstress broke forth. The words were German, and Edith could not catch their full meaning, but the music thrilled her whole soul; it was so sad, so passionate, so piercingly sweet; she could not keep back the tears, and looking at Mrs. Haughton she saw that her eyes were wet also.

There was silence when the last chord and the last low lingering note of song died away; and Estelle came from the piano and sat down between Isabel and Edith. Her face was like her singing—sad, lovely, and expressive, and her voice even in talking was like the far-off music of silvery bells on a sunshiny summer-day. She spoke of her life in a French convent, where she had finished her education; she discussed Mendelssohn and other celebrated composers, and she seemed to have read and remembered all the current literature of the day; and Edith thought her a very interesting person.

After a while, Edith played herself, and she was delighted to find that she had lost but little of her musical skill and ability; it was indeed exquisite pleasure to find her fingers wandering once more over the keys of a brilliant-toned pianoforte, and it was little less pleasure to Philip to listen to his wife's performance. She played the overture to "Guillaume Tell" with Mrs. Haughton, and Philip liked it far better than Estelle's dreamy, sentimental "Leid." Edwin, on the contrary, preferred the vocal to the instrumental performance.

And so, in music, and animated conversation, and looking over some foreign curiosities, the evening passed quickly and pleasantly away; and, in the clear moonlight of the serene spring night, Philip and Edith returned as they came, on foot.

"Edie," said Philip, just as they came within sight of their own house, "of course what I am going to say is in strict confidence; but do you know I have found out that Edwin is not so rich after all?—he is pressed for money already."

"Indeed!" replied Edith, in a tone of the profoundest astonishment; "but how can that be? Did he tell you so?"

"Well! yes—no, not exactly. He talked about a temporary inconvenience, and he asked me—"

"Not to lend him money, surely?" interrupted Edith.

"No! he only wanted me to lend him my name."

"I do not understand," said Edith, feeling, however, a little uncomfortable.

"Well, I suppose not, and I cannot explain it clearly; however, I declined for the present."

"I am very glad of that!" replied Edith, with a vague sense of relief; and no more was said by either of them on the subject.

CHAPTER VII.

CONFIDENTIAL.

That printing for the chapel was the forerunner of many new openings in Philip's business; he received profitable orders from quarters where he believed himself quite unknown, or at least unthought-of: some small publishing matters fell into his hands, and a celebrated physician, who lived in the neighbourhood of Abercrombie-square, took a special fancy to the young bookseller and his modest young wife, and patronized them to the extent of ordering from him all the books, pamphlets, serials, and stationery used by himself or his family, besides recommending him to his friends, many of whom were willing enough to interest themselves about any one whom Dr. Delany thought fit to honour with his notice.

So it came to pass that Philip's business greatly increased, and he began to feel as if a heavy anxiety were lifted from his mind; for the cares and toils of trade seemed nothing in comparison with the anxiety of incertitude. Far worse was an insufficiency of customers than an occasional over-pressure of work. Edith too rejoiced in the prosperity which now crowned their efforts, and the pleasant springtide melted

into a warm, balmy summer, and found her full of hope, and a peaceful, happy content. Very pleasant were those long, bright summer days; though the mignonette-boxes and a few pelagoniums and fuchsias were all the green things that smiled on Myrtle-place; and though the song of a caged lark, and the twitter of the poor town-bred eaves-sparrows, was all the bird-music that enlivened the neighbourhood. And sometimes she and Philip found time to take a ramble down the coast to Waterloo, or to Crosby, or to cross the river to Eastham, or to New Brighton, which Edith felt she must always love, for the sake of that bright, happy Christmas-day, when she first became Edith Proctor.

One evening in the early summer, when the days were at the longest, they were returning home from Eastham; and had hardly taken their seats in the boat ere they were accosted by Mr. and Mrs. Haughton, who were also going back to Liverpool, after a stroll in the woods. Isabel looked pale and weary, and Edith thought there was an air of sadness and anxiety in her general aspect. She was not dressed with much care; she wore expensive things certainly; but Edith, in her plain, light-brown alpaca, and her straw bonnet, simply trimmed with white and pink, outshone her wealthy and beautiful friend, whose elegant French barège flounces swept the deck of the little steamer, whose scarf cost more than Edith's whole toilet, and whose Parisian bonnet had been the cynosure of all the admiring eyes in Bold-street, while it was yet in its first unsullied purity and freshness. Now the flounces were torn, and as much creased, and as limp, as so soft and delicate a material could be; the scarf was worn awry, and the white chip and the ostrich feather looked as if they had felt the influence of many a spring shower, and many a dash of salt spray from the river.

Altogether there was a certain something in Isabel's appearance, singularly at variance with her former airy grace and faultless taste—something that could only be characterized as a want of general neatness—the frayed boots, and soiled gloves, and carelessly-tied bonnet-strings, almost earned for their fair wearer the character of slattern.

"Where was it that my husband saved Mr. Haughton's life?" asked Edith, when the boat was fairly on its way.

"O, farther up the river, more towards Runcorn, I think, but I am not certain," replied Isabel, languidly, without any of the enthusiasm of speech or manner she had once manifested whenever the subject was introduced. She was sitting now leaning over the side of the steamer, and looking dreamily over the wide expanse of heaving waters, on which the rosy tints of evening yet burned. There was an air of sadness about her that touched Edith's loving heart—she longed to ask her if anything had happened to grieve her, and yet she feared to venture upon so great a liberty. Philip and Edwin walked away to the other side of the boat; the latter seemed anxious to have some conversation with his friend, so the two ladies were left quite to themselves—there were no other passengers near them.

"How is Miss Drummond? She is not with you this evening," asked Edith, presently, by way of breaking the silence, which she found rather oppressive.

"Very well; Estelle is quite well; she is never otherwise, though sometimes she chooses to consider herself out of health and out of spirits. She had an engagement this evening; and indeed I had one too, but I threw it up that I might enjoy a country ramble and a breeze on the river. Edwin had promised to come over to Eastham, and as he was in a wonderful good temper, I had not much difficulty in persuading him to redeem his pledge. I quite expected, though, he would excuse himself when he found Estelle was not coming."

There was something in Isabel's tone that sounded very strange; the words in themselves were not pleasant to hear, but there was an inexpressible bitterness in the way they were spoken. Edith looked at her with grave concern.

"Pray do not misunderstand me," she cried, hastily, stammering in her desire to explain herself; "I did not mean that Edwin would care more for Estelle's society than that of any other woman; only—only you see a man, when he has been married six months and more, thinks his wife

very tame company. Perhaps you have found this out. We young wives have all to discover our own particular skeleton in the cupboard."

"I have not found mine yet," said Edith, warmly. "I am much happier than when I was first married. I understand my husband so much better; I know more of his goodness, of his kindness, of his cleverness. I think nothing could shake my trust in Philip—my dear Philip—who thinks no company in the world pleasant or exhilarating if it do not include his wife, and who is quite satisfied with her simple talk, and never quite happy or contented if she is away from him."

"Edith!" cried Isabel, excitedly, "are you in earnest? Do you really mean what you say? Have you indeed found in your husband all that you hoped for? Are you in very truth as happy as you were in the first bright days of your married life?"

"I am happier—yes, far happier, for at first I had doubts of many things. I was afraid I should never make a good wife; but now, though I am very far from what I might be, I am not so anxious, since I find my husband is content, and even thinks no one in the world could possibly suit him half so well. Yes, I am happy—altogether happy—so far as my married life is concerned."

Isabel made no answer, but she turned her head away, and seemed to be regarding intently the fast-receding shores of Eastham; and Edith saw that her tears were falling fast. She could keep silence no longer. "Dear Isabel, what is the matter? you are so pale and sad, so unlike your bright, sunny self; has anything happened to grieve you? Are you not well?"

"I do not think I am," returned Isabel, dashing away the tears. "How that golden light on the water dazzles one's sight! I am not feeling well at all; I am so tired, and the days seem so long and wearisome; and—O Edith! I wish you would tell me how to be quietly happy as you are. You cannot think how I envy you."

"Most people would think the envy ought to be on my

side," said Edith, smiling. "You have everything that the world counts enviable—wealth, beauty, position, all kinds of luxuries—"

"Stop, stop," cried Isabel, vehemently; "why do you, of all people, irritate me by enumerating such stupid, soulless things as advantages? I would give them all to feel *satisfied* —satisfied with myself, and with others around me. O! I wish I were poor. I wish I had been a governess as you were, Edith, without a sovereign that was not earned. Never wish to be rich; money will bring you only harass, and disappointment, and distrust. Never wish that you had been an heiress; as it is, you know, you are positively certain that your husband did not marry you for money."

"I never do wish to be rich. Sometimes I have been anxious when the business has disappointed us: at first we were afraid it would not answer, and Philip had sunk all he had in it; sometimes whole days went by, and we did so little that it was scarcely worth while keeping shop: but now matters are changed; we are much busier; we have printing to do, and we have more regular orders, as well as many more chance customers. It is a great cause for thankfulness, that we are allowed such fair promise of success, in the first year of our married life."

"I will tell you what I envy you," interrupted Isabel, passionately; "it is that *we*, and that *our*, that seem so natural to you; you and your husband have but one interest, you are one in cares and in pleasures; one in joy and in sorrow; one in life, as you will be one in death."

Edith changed colour; it was her turn now to grow pale and tremble, and such words made her remember what she had well-nigh forgotten, the unstable tenure upon which her sweet, calm happiness rested. She turned away, as Isabel had done before, to look on the rosy-tinted waves, now, however, losing their glow in the gathering shades of evening; and the tears came into her eyes, as the thought crossed her mind, that neither Philip nor herself had any sure hope of the bliss of the world to come. If death should come—she shuddered at the thought—where would be the assurance of a

blessed re-union beyond the grave! O! poor, and weak, and liable to a thousand pangs, is that happiness, however pure, however deep, that has this life for its limits!

But soon she turned again to Isabel, and said, "How strange it seems to hear any one sincerely wishing one's self poor! Ah, you do not know what it is to be straitened; to want many things, to be obliged to do without all that is not strictly necessary; to feel overburdened with care about the future; to be compelled to make it one's study how to spend money, when it must be spent to the very best advantage. If you were to experience all these things for a short time, depend upon it you would as earnestly wish for the return of your past wealth. I think Agar's prayer is best, 'Give me neither poverty, nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.' I suppose—nay, I am sure—that the lot God gives us is the best that can possibly befall us."

"I wish I could feel that; of course I know it; but knowing and feeling truths are different things. I wish I were good, like you, Edith."

"O hush!" cried Edith, imploringly, "I am not good at all; I am content with my lot certainly, but if anything were to happen to Philip"—her voice grew husky and unsteady, and her heart throbbed at the bare idea—"I am sure I should not be content; I should be rebellious, wicked. Ah! I dare not think what I should be."

"You are a very happy woman," was Isabel's sole response; "I only wish I knew your secret—yet what matter? it would not avail *me*. Happiness and I have nothing in common."

She said this in so despairing a tone, that Edith was shocked; but ere she could say more, the gentlemen returned, and they were rapidly nearing the landing-stage.

Mrs. Haughton's carriage was awaiting her, and Philip and Edith, at her request, rode with her to their own house. During the drive, she seemed to recover her spirits; she laughed and chatted gaily, and said witty things with that charming air that Edith knew of old, when she first saw her in Mrs. Glynn's drawing-room. Edith would have fancied

that the conversation on board the Eastham boat was all a dream, almost that the marriage itself was only a dream, so much she talked and smiled like the Isabel Clive of last year. Ah! but then she would not have gone to walk with her lover in that ungraceful toilet. Isabel Clive dressed elegantly, and a scrupulous delicacy and purity always characterized her attire. Isabel Haughton dressed carelessly and untidily, and common tidiness and she seemed to have parted company. Edith hoped it would only be for a time.

But, though Mrs. Haughton talked so brilliantly, and with so much apparent good humour, both Philip and Edith noticed that she never addressed her husband, and that when he spoke to her once or twice, she returned the briefest answers, and looked another way. Edith felt quite glad when her own little domicile was reached, for she saw clearly that her friends were ill at ease with each other, and, supposing they had had a quarrel, was most anxious to leave them to themselves, judging that Isabel, like herself, would be glad to take the earliest opportunity of reconcilement—not that she had ever yet needed reconciliation with her husband, for so far they had taken heed to Miss Wilson's warning, and avoided even the far-off shadow of their first quarrel. O! if Philip ever were displeased with her, how dreadful it would be! No doubt Mr. Haughton, who looked of fiery mood, although he was so handsome, had been very angry with poor Isabel—no wonder she was so pale and miserable. But then, that need not have made her careless in her dress, neither need she have looked so cold and so proud when her husband addressed her.

As they were parting, Philip said, "Mrs. Haughton, Edwin has promised me to come and spend an hour or two in Myrtle-place, next Monday evening; I know Edith will be delighted, if you and Miss Drummond will take tea with her."

"O! will you come?" asked Edith, with a face that showed how genuinely she responded to her husband's invitation. "I have never asked you because our way and your way are so very different. I have wished it once or

twice, but it seemed too much like the wayside daisy sending an invitation to the garden-rose. Still, if you do not mind externals, and I am sure you do not, I shall be so very glad if you will come as Philip says, and take tea with us—come early, that is at four o'clock, and bring your work, as Miss Wilson does; it will be quite charming."

"Very well, I will; I take you at your word," returned Mrs. Haughton; "only instead of bringing my work I propose that you should have some ready for me; I know you have some on hand—I can sew, I think, but I have not done any for a long time. Good-bye, Mr. Proctor; good-bye, dear Edith—expect me at four o'clock on Monday afternoon, not a minute later."

"Edith, love," said Philip, when the carriage had driven on, "you said nothing about Miss Drummond: Mrs. Haughton will think you do not wish to include her cousin in your little dish of tea and gossip next Monday. Why did you not say you would be very happy to see her also?"

"Because I could not, Philip; if Miss Drummond should come I will make her welcome, but I shall not be glad to see her: there is something about her I both dislike and distrust—I had rather Isabel came alone. Poor thing! she does not seem either as well or as happy as usual."

"Indeed! I thought she seemed in excellent spirits; her gaiety was even exuberant during our drive."

"Ah! that was nothing; that was only put on to hide a deeper feeling. She was very miserable when we were talking together in the boat whilst you and Mr. Haughton were at the other end, or on the paddle-box, or somewhere. She did not say what was the matter, only she intimated that she thought her husband had married her for her money; but of course that was a mere fancy."

"I hope so, Edie; but I sometimes fear for them; I never was quite satisfied with the tone in which he spoke of her before their marriage. But what queer creatures you women are! What is it you dislike in Miss Drummond? I thought you rather admired her, that first time we saw her at Redcliffe House?"

"I did admire her very much; that is to say, I admired her as a lovely and accomplished young woman; but even then, there was an indescribable something in her looks and in her tone that made me feel cautious in my conversation with her; and since then, every time I have seen her and spoken with her, this feeling of distrust has been confirmed! No! I shall never like Estelle Drummond."

"Very well, my dear, I am quite content that you should dislike her; I hope for your sake she will not come with her cousin on Monday afternoon. And Edie, my love, I am so glad that I married a fortune *in* my wife, and not *with* her. What a fortunate mortal I was!"

"That remains to be seen," said Edith, archly; "wait till we have been married twenty-one years; then, indeed, if you can still declare yourself the favourite of matrimonial fortune, we may presume that you are not merely infatuated."

On Monday afternoon, to Edith's great relief, Isabel came alone; Miss Drummond was spending a week in the neighbourhood of Manchester, and her cousin was certainly not at all inclined to grieve over her absence. Isabel seemed happier than when the Proctors had met her in the Eastham ferry-boat; but she was still grave, and looked at times pale and thoughtful and weary. She enjoyed sitting in Edith's pretty drawing-room, and seeing so many people and vehicles pass by; and after tea, when Philip had gone down-stairs again to his business, she began to talk confidentially, telling her hostess how much she envied her mode of life, while her own existence was mere existence, and no more; "she was of no positive use to anybody, and the world would go on quite as well if she were out of it."

"Nay," said Edith, "not quite so bad as that. I am sure there are some persons in the world who would be very sad if you were out of it."

"I do not know why they should; I wish I led your kind of life. It would be worth some trouble and some fatigue to be of real use."

"I am afraid you would find my mode of life very wearisome, and even intolerable; besides, it is not needful that

you should work as I do, or, at least, in the same way, for work, I suppose, we all have; it only differs in kind and in extent."

"Tell me what you do all day, if you do not mind?"

"Well, I get up about seven, and help Matty with the breakfast—that is, I make the coffee and the toast while she lays the table. Breakfast is over by half-past eight, then I generally read a little, or Philip stays talking to me before he goes into the shop. When Matty has washed up the breakfast things, I help her to make my bed, and I dust and tidy my own room and this room also, for I could never trust Matty's clumsy fingers among my pretty things. Then it is time to look into the larder, and see what I have there, and what I need; and I make the pudding or the pie, and decide about the dinner generally, and take care that the fire is made up for cooking. Then the cooking requires my personal attention; if there is a plain joint roasting, I take my work, or my book, and sit in the kitchen while Matty goes about her business; for if left to herself she would be certain to let the meat stand, and would never think of touching the basting-spoon. Of course I make the gravy; for Matty's notion of gravy is dashing a gallon of warm water into the dripping-pan, before the fat is poured off, with a general flavouring of ashes and bits of cinder. After dinner I read or go out; I have one or two poor people that I visit; and after tea I go on with my sewing, or help Philip till the shop is closed, and then I do nothing particular—talk to him, or read with him, as he likes best; and at half-past ten we go to bed. That is our general routine, and one day is very much like another."

"I should like to try it," said Isabel. "I should like my husband to be dependent on me for all his comforts. I suppose you mend Mr. Proctor's stockings?"

"Yes! and even his outer garments sometimes: every stitch that is taken for him, except, of course, actual tailoring, is taken with my own fingers. I like it to be so. I should not like any one to sew for my husband, or to iron his

collars, or to put away the litters he makes, like all other men."

"Do you know, I think I shall begin to-morrow to try to see after my own household matters? I am sure I should be happier. But I am afraid the servants will be angry, and perhaps give notice. Would you think, Mrs. Proctor, I have never been inside my kitchen but once since I married? for I am in mortal terror of the cook, and Edwin says she is extremely unprincipled, he is sure."

"Here is Mr. Haughton," said Edith, looking up from her work. Isabel immediately withdrew into herself, and maintained a dignified reserve for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST GRIEF.

The summer and autumn quietly passed away, and though Philip's business did not seem likely just yet to bring him speedy and remarkable wealth, it gradually and steadily increased, so that before the winter set in he was obliged to engage an assistant in the shop, as well as to multiply hands in the printing department. And Edith felt happier as the uneventful months rolled on; and yet sometimes, looking onwards into the dim, mysterious future, her heart trembled and sank within her; for she knew that the whole fabric of her sweet, calm felicity rested on a foundation that might at any moment be swept away by the waves of mortal change, or the resistless tide of circumstance. Like to a trusting, gleesome child, who plants a fair garden in the cool, damp sea-sand, whence the waters have ebbed since the spring-tides, rejoicing in its fairy-like beauty, and yet dimly dreading the hour when the surging waves *may* rise strong and high on the shore, sweeping away to utter desolation the tender leaves,

and gay blossoms, and willow-boundaries of his little parterre, so Edith, while she rejoiced in the blessed lot that God had given her, felt sometimes a vague, undefined dread of some coming storm that might even now be rising as a scarcely perceptible cloud on the far-off horizon.

Why was this? Why could not Edith, so gentle, so pure-hearted, so loving, find perfect rest and joy in the wedded life that God Himself had ordained and blessed? It was only this—Edith and Philip "lacked one thing," and that, alas! was "the one thing needful." That one thing, without which the fairest heritage on earth, the sweetest and holiest ties, the purest and deepest love, must fail to satisfy the yearning human heart that can never be filled with aught that pertains to mortality alone. There was this difference in the experience of husband and wife: Philip was perfectly unconscious of his need; he was upright in all his dealings, true of heart, generous, unselfish, and perfectly devoted to his young wife, and it never occurred to him that aught was lacking, or that a change of life and soul could indeed be required of him; while Edith was mournfully aware of the non-existence of vital piety, or true Christian principle, in her own heart. In a word, she had learned that ere she could enter the kingdom of heaven she must be born again; but how that spiritual birth was to be effected she had no idea; and she was often ready to exclaim with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?"

This may seem strange when we know that Edith heard every Sabbath-day the Gospel proclaimed in all its glorious freedom and fulness. Nay, she often attended the week-night services, and listened with deep interest to the sermons that were then more especially addressed to those who professed to be members of Christ's Church militant, and heirs of the glory and joy of the blessed world beyond the grave. But such cases are not uncommon: she, like many others, received the words of life in an intellectual sense alone; all that she heard she indeed tested by Scripture warranty, and her judgment approved the doctrines thus impressed upon her mind; she recognized also the beauty and joy of the Christian

life; she felt that in Christ alone could rest and perfect peace be found,—that unless her soul were united to Him, in living faith, it must for all time wander wearily and vainly from one object of interest to another, ever restless and yearning for the peace and joy which the world can neither give nor take away; never lifted above an atmosphere of earthly doubts and tremors, never "satisfied." (Psalm xvii. 15.) O, how that word "*satisfied*" sometimes filled all her mind, and engrossed all her thoughts! It seemed to her as a note of celestial music; it expressed, far more than aught else, that perfect trust, that full content, that holy rest, which she believed to be the portion of the children of God. To be satisfied, included all things else.

Sometimes it seemed to her that the new life was almost begun; sometimes she felt as if she would count all things but loss, so that she might win Christ, and be found in him, at the day of his appearing. What, then, was it that kept her back from her greatest gain, her supreme and unspeakable good? Perhaps the sweetness of her happy married life, so different from the stormy changes of her orphaned, unprotected youth, had been a snare. The purest and holiest joys of life may become fatal snares, if they be all unsanctified; and sometimes that text, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," thrilled Edith's heart with a dim, but painful perception that she was not fulfilling the Divine command. Yes, Philip was her idol; and that, not because she loved him with all the strength and passion of woman's deepest tenderest affection, but because he kept her back from God. She could not resolve to tread the path which she must tread alone—for alone it seemed; it mattered little to her that thousands of saints had trodden, and were still treading, that blessed path, the King's highway—that prophets, and kings, and martyrs had made the journey—that even now, some of those she reverenced and loved, in greater or less degree, were travelling that way, their faces Zionward, and their gaze fixed upon its blissful end. Where her husband was not, was a solitude always; with him, she needed no other companionship; without him, how many soever, and

however kind and true, the friends that gathered around her, she was alone. She would go on pilgrimage some day, but not yet—O not yet, for Philip could not, and would not start with her.

And then a great horror came upon her lest the close of mortal probation might be very near at hand, and she and Philip severed eternally; for though there would be the communion of saints in the life of the world to come, there would be, could be, no communion, in its true sense, of the lost in their dreary regions of misery and despair. Poor Edith! and she would have been perfectly happy but for this sense of insecurity that came over and anon to mar her brightest hours, her sweetest moments.

It was the first Sunday in November, and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was to be administered. The sermon was chiefly addressed to communicants, and the text was one that has thrilled many a human heart with its word of lofty command, mingled with a tenderness and a pathos that cannot be expressed—"Do this in remembrance of me." But at the close of the discourse came a faithful, earnest appeal to those who would turn away from the feast—who would refuse to remember Christ, by the partaking of the Divine symbols, and by communing with their brethren according to His own institution. "Perhaps," said the pastor, as he closed his Bible—"perhaps this may be to some one here present Christ's final pleading—He may never again condescend to entreat the sinner—this may be His last message, His last invitation. Now you turn away, you separate yourselves from His faithful people: in vain for you the board is spread, in vain for you the wine is poured and the bread is broken, in vain for you He meets His people in this sanctuary, saying, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!' When next we gather round the table to celebrate our Master's dying love, you may be past the reach of the Gospel message, past hope, past repentance. Shall it be so, or will you listen to the Divine voice that says once more, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest'? Whoso drinketh of earthly streams shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that

Jesus Christ gives shall never thirst—but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The sermon was over, the concluding hymn sung, the blessing given, and the congregation rose up to depart, and with them Philip and Edith. It was a soft mild day, more like an early September Sabbath than a Sunday in November; the sky was pure, the sun shining in golden cloudless splendour, and in the woodlands far away from the great town the bright-hued leaves were falling gently from the faintly-rustling branches—it was a day of calm serene beauty, quiet, mellow, and radiant, and yet touched with the sad loveliness of quickly-coming decay and hovering death. It was a day such as makes one ponder on the close of mortal life—a day to whisper of work accomplished, labour o'er, hopes blighted or fulfilled, and earthly cares sinking away from their very insignificance, when viewed in the clear broad light of the solemn dawn of eternity—a day whereon we involuntarily forget the turmoils, the thronging anxieties, the eager ambitions, the surging perplexities of the busy work-a-day world, and look forward to the evening of human existence—the night that must come ere long, with its cool shadows, and its heavy mists; when toil shall cease, and the tired hand rest quietly on the unheaving breast, and the weary eyelids close over the sightless orbs, and the pale brows ache no longer, and the lips be mute and chill, and the throbbing, oft-anguished heart beat no more.

"How very silent you are, Edie!" said Philip, as they walked along in the pleasant sunshine towards their home. "Are you very tired this morning? I feared you would be. I think I must not let you go to chapel any more, till you are quite strong and well again."

"I was thinking," said Edith, sadly, "that perhaps I might never go there any more; I was considering whether the close of the sermon might not really apply to me—I may die as others have, and then—" She could say no more, her voice failed her; the mere thought of leaving Philip was too painful to be entertained with anything approaching to equanimity; even the bare idea filled her eyes with tears,

and made her tremble so much that Philip turned to her with real anxiety—

"We had better ride, dear Edie; I see a cab on the stand yonder."

"No, no," she replied, smiling through her tears, "we will do nothing of the kind. I am quite well enough to walk a much greater distance. I am very silly and very much ashamed of myself; and yet, O Philip! I cannot help it. We have been so very, very happy—at least, I have. I never thought one *could* live in this troublous world and be so intensely happy—so perfectly content; and now I think it may be that a change is coming: we may be separated."

"Now, Edie, my darling—now, really, it is worse than foolish of you to talk in this way; it is only because you are out of health and out of spirits that you are haunted by such dismal apprehensions. I am sure there is no ground for fears so appalling and so calculated to do you a serious mischief. Put away such dreary thoughts, I beseech you. If you entertain them, you will infect me also."

"I do not know that it is so much the idea of death that daunts me," pursued Edith, hesitatingly, and yet in a tone that showed that she was feeling too much to be silent. "Do you remember those lines you were reading to me the other evening from Mrs. Barrett Browning's 'Lay of the Brown Rosario'—

> 'For death itself I did not fear—'tis love that makes the pain;
> Love feareth death. I was no child—I was betrothed that day;
> I wore a troth-kiss on my lips I could not give away'?"

"Yes, I remember them, dearest. I understand how you would apply them. But cheer up; there is no reason why you should disquiet yourself. I wonder if Isabel is nervous?"

Edith did not answer. She had seen Isabel only the day before, and she knew that Isabel had been wishing she might die, declaring she was quite tired of life; the world was one vast illusion, one prolonged disappointment; there was nothing worth living for. And Edith had shuddered at the

tone in which these dreary sentiments were uttered—a tone of intense bitterness and earnestness, that bore witness to the fierce despairing emotions of the speaker. It was no secret now in certain circles that Edwin Haughton and his beautiful wife lived very unhappily. Poor Isabel! She thought that neat little parlour behind the shop in Myrtle-place a perfect Elysium, and wished that she too had to work and practise economy, while her husband toiled for their daily bread. Willingly would she have exchanged Redcliffe House, with all its splendours, for Edith's humble home, could she but find in her husband the satisfaction Edith found in Philip; could she but exchange neglect, coldness, selfishness, and hollow gaiety for sympathy, gentleness, and devoted affection.

The next evening found the little household in Myrtle-place in direst dismay. A little daughter, a small fragile baby, whose tiny spark of life seemed just kindled only to flicker and die out again, lay in the pretty cot that Edith's hands had so daintily prepared. No one seemed to trouble themselves very much about the baby; it was carefully wrapped up in its warm nest, and placed by the fire to live or to die, as it pleased God, who gives or resumes this fleeting breath of ours according to his own good pleasure; and no one gave much thought to the unconscious little stranger, whose spirit was hovering between two worlds, as if half reluctant to trust itself to the dangers, and fears, and sorrows of mortal existence; for on the bed lay the pale young mother, Philip's darling Edith, on the verge of the eternal world.

Miss Wilson was there, sad, trembling, but composed; and, sitting by the fire, and looking abstractedly at the cradle with a genuine air of compassion on her handsome face, was Mrs. Glynn, whom Miss Wilson had begged to come to her assistance with her matronly counsel and experience. The doctor had been there many hours, but he was gone now; he had other patients who needed his presence, and he was obliged to leave poor Edith, though Philip wildly besought him to stay another hour. Indeed there was nothing to be done;

human skill and care had in no wise been spared; and the watchers in that quiet room could only pray, and gaze on the white senseless face that seemed fast settling down into the rigid composure of death. Now and then Miss Wilson or the nurse placed some cordial between the half-parted colourless lips, but every time the attempt was made it seemed more and more hopeless. Mrs. Glynn came once or twice to the bedside to suggest something, but she felt that life was ebbing fast away, that no mortal aid could any longer prevail.

And Philip, poor Philip! He sat in the adjoining room, that pretty drawing-room which had been such an innocent pride and pleasure to poor Edith: he sat over the expiring embers, his face buried in his hands, his heart rent with anguish, and his whole manly frame convulsed with the strong emotion that he neither tried nor cared to restrain. They had come to tell him she must die; and he would not, could not, believe it; but since then he had stood by her side, and seen her altered countenance, and heard her faint, irregular breathing, and he had spoken to her in his tenderest tone, beseeching her to look at him, to open her eyes, to speak one little word, one whisper, to give one pressure of the hand, one faintest sign in recognition of his presence.

But no sign came: the white eyelids were closed; the little hand was chill and nerveless in Philip's tender clasp; the pallid lips never moved; for the first time since she had been his Edith, his voice was powerless to win one glance of love, one smile, one thought, one thrill of happy feeling.

Presently Miss Wilson bethought herself of the grief-stricken man, sitting alone with his great sorrow, and she went to see how it fared with him. He lifted his head as she entered, dreading what her errand might be;—was she come to tell him, in her gentle way, that all was over; that his Edith would never, never speak to him again, never sit by his side any more, never more share his woe or weal? The tears came thick and fast into her kind eyes, as she saw the anguish in his haggard face,—he looked years older than when he had welcomed her in the morning, and she hastened to answer the question he dared not ask.

"She is still living," she said, very kindly: "I think there is no change since you saw her last."

"Then she may recover," he said, hoarsely, and in a strange, passionate tone, quite new to his auditor. "While there is life there is hope; she is very young, scarcely twenty-two: God cannot mean to take her away from me. What have *I* done that I should be thus smitten in my soul? What has she done, that she should be snatched away from life and joy —she so pure, and good, and gentle? She must not, *shall not die!*"

"Hush! Philip Proctor!" said Miss Wilson, in a tone almost of command. "Dare not to take God to task; question not His wisdom, His *love*. Your Edith is in His hands: He loves her, with a love compared with which even your fond affection is as nothing: He will do for her what is best."

He turned upon her fiercely: "Do not talk to me in that strain; I cannot bear it. It is best that she should live! You will drive me mad, if you say any more—I tell you she *must* live!—I cannot let her die! You say prayer is powerful; pray then that she may recover."

"I do," was the quiet sad rejoinder; "but I dare not say 'Spare her, dear Lord,' without adding 'if it be Thy will.'"

And finding her sympathy was fruitless, she returned to Edith's room, leaving the miserable man to make his solitary moan over his shattered idol, that seemed melting into nothingness in his very grasp. Is there any sorrow like unto the deep heart-sorrow of a man who has never learned, never striven to say, never dreamed of saying, "Thy will be done!"

CHAPTER IX.

CONVALESCENCE.

THE hours glided on, too swiftly it seemed to those anxious watchers by Edith's bedside, and still she remained in that trance-like stupor, from which it was feared she could never awaken; and yet still she lived. The weary night-watch passed; the new day arose pale, grey, and piercingly cold; the pallid moon shot out from heavy, lowering clouds; and another evening, with its mists and shadows, closed over the chilly world, from which the golden calm of the Indian summer had suddenly departed, to make way for the dreary inclemencies of early winter; and still that white face on the pillow wore its passive, fading expression; and still the faint breath came and went, as though very soon it must cease entirely; and still the tiny babe wailed feebly on the nurse's lap. When would it all be over?

And when another morning came, the neighbours looked out to see if the shutters were up, and finding all the front windows undarkened, told each other "that poor Mrs. Proctor was still alive!" And then confidential matrons exchanged experiences, and declared that since it had gone on so long, she might not die after all; they had known cases equally critical which had ended favourably, and they had no doubt but that poor dear Mrs. Proctor would begin to rally before many more hours were over, and then, with good nursing and the best medical aid, she might in reasonable time be herself again.

And they were right. There was a severe and a prolonged struggle, but finally youth and an excellent constitution prevailed; and on Wednesday afternoon, when Philip bent down for the hundredth time to kiss the pale, quiet lips, there was a tremulous movement about the mouth as if it would fain return

the tender caress; and the little damp fingers he held trembled, as if they acknowledged the gentle presence of that beloved hand. Philip's heart beat wildly: these were signs of returning animation; there had been nothing like response since the commencement of her illness, and now surely she knew that it was her husband who was by her side; surely this consciousness and these feeble indications of life were pledges of blessed restoration. An hour later, the eyes that had been well nigh sealed in death opened, and seemed wandering about in search of some familiar object; and Miss Wilson hastened to summon Philip. He came and spoke to his wife, and she smiled faintly and tried to speak, and even whispered some word of love or thanks, when, according to nurse's desire, he had administered two or three tea-spoonsful of wine and water. Later in the evening there was a more decided improvement; her breathing was more regular, her consciousness uninterrupted, and she could speak, though very feebly. Then she asked for her babe, and they brought the poor little fragile creature and laid it by her side, and then, encircled by its mother's arm, it ceased its plaintive wailing, and slumbered quietly, till after awhile Edith herself fell into a sweet, tranquil sleep, which lasted till the night was far advanced.

From that hour, slowly but surely she recovered; and the baby, though it could not be said to thrive, did not dwindle away, as nurse and most of the matrons in the neighbourhood had declared would be the case. It was quieter, now that it could lie on its mother's bosom; and if no one save Edith could see any beauty in its skinny fingers and preternaturally old face, at least it filled her heart with joy to listen to its feeble breathing, and feel the slight pressure of its little form on her arm. She was rather disappointed that Philip took so little notice of his new daughter, who had just conferred upon him the honours of paternity. He thought her, if the truth must be known, a very ugly, tiny, troublesome specimen of humanity; and, in his overwhelming anxiety for his wife, she might have perished three or four times over, had it been possible, without calling forth anything like deep regret in the heart of her father. Poor little blossom! only her mother

seemed satisfied with her; and to her she was a treasure, a gem of great price, far before the bonniest, finest baby in the world! Nurse privately declared she had no pleasure in dressing such a poor, shabby baby, and she thought it would be a good thing if God would please to take it, for it would never grow up a strong, healthy girl; and even Miss Wilson told Philip it would be rather a blessing than otherwise if in the first days of its existence its little, low, wailing cry were hushed in death—"there would be," was her silent thought, "one more angel in heaven, and one sufferer the less on the earth."

But the days passed on, and it still lived, clinging, as it were, with wonderful tenacity to its frail hold on this mortal life; and when Philip saw how Edith's heart was filled with motherly hopes and fears about the poor little thing—how passionately she seemed to love it, never tiring even of its small piping cry of weariness—he began also to regard it with something like solicitude, and to watch the doctor's countenance with anxiety, when he pronounced his opinion on the babe, as well as when he answered his eager questionings respecting Edith's progression towards convalescence. It was some time before Edith could be said to be fairly out of danger, and it was longer still before she felt assured in her own mind that God would restore her to her husband and permit her to devote herself to the care of the new and precious treasure he had given to her keeping.

And when the worst part of her illness was over, and she was suffering only from weakness, very deep were her communings with her own heart. She knew that she had been on the brink of the eternal world; she knew that she had been for many days and nights hovering on the verge of that other life, of which she knew so little, and from which her trembling soul sank back dismayed and appalled. The warmth, the light, the joy of this world was so sweet, so blissful—the chill uncertainty, the darkness, and the sadness of the unknown world, so terrible, so gloomy, so spectral, as silently she contemplated the possibility of its exceeding nearness to herself! She would certainly have recovered more

rapidly had her mind been at ease; and her careful attendants little knew the reason why she could not sleep or take the nourishing diet so necessary for her health.

Some days passed in this way. She felt like a brand snatched from the burning, and she felt, too, that henceforth she could never again be at rest as she had been before her illness—never be at peace till she had secured her soul's salvation. She was like an infant groping in the dark, stretching out weak arms towards some invisible support, half uncertain of their vicinity, and yet confident that in those kind "everlasting arms" alone could she find the refuge she sought. Her cry was, "Lord, save me, or I perish!" She could say no more, unless it were, "Lord, hear me, for thy tender mercies' sake!" "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!" But could she have uttered words more prevailing? No! her strength was in her weakness; she trusted alone in Him who receives all who come to Him in humble penitence and faith; she trusted in Christ the Lord; she took Him at His gracious word, which assures every trembling sinner of pardon and peace, freely and fully bestowed in Him; and her fears were stayed, her soul was comforted, and her heart was at rest.

And all this so far she had kept to herself. No one knew the fiery struggle through which she had passed; no one knew that she had awakened to a new life, other than that to which she was so mercifully restored. Philip thought she looked very serious, and once or twice he was vexed that, with returning health, her former sweet content, and her winning gaiety, came not back again. He tried to think it was not so, and yet there seemed something like restraint in her manner—some strange and inexplicable barrier seemed rising up, silently and mysteriously, between himself and the wife he loved so well. At last, one Sunday evening, when the tiny baby was sleeping quietly, and nurse was gone to the evening service, she ventured to speak to him of all that had so deeply occupied her mind during the period of her slow and tedious recovery. It was a great effort, for hitherto, when she had spoken on this momentous subject, he had appeared to understand her so little; and on more than one

occasion he had seemed as much annoyed as Philip possibly could be with his darling Edie. How much she regretted not having earlier pursued the current of thought which had so much engrossed her at the time of her marriage!

The husband and wife sat together on the sofa drawn up to the comfortable fire in Edith's bed-room, for she was not sufficiently strong to venture down-stairs. They were speaking of that Sunday when she had last attended Divine service; and Edith, half timid, half hopeful, seized upon this opportunity to utter that which lay so very near her heart.

"Philip," she began, a little nervously, "do you remember, as we came from chapel that Sunday morning, how I was filled with miserable fears about the result of the trial that was coming upon me? Do you remember how I feared that you and I might be about to part? My dread has been very nearly verified—has it not, dear?"

"Yes, very nearly," replied Philip, shudderingly, and holding her tighter as he spoke. "But, darling, do not think about that; let us never talk about it, it is too sad, even in remembrance; let it be only as a miserable dream, from which we have been happily awakened."

"Ah! but, Philip, dearest, I must think about it; I have thought of little else since consciousness returned, and I have something to tell you. What do you think it is?"

"Indeed I cannot say," he replied gravely, and in a tone that almost deterred her from pursuing her subject. But she felt that it was wrong, and worse than weak, to shrink back; the truth must be told some time, and why not now? Courage would not come with delay; the time had arrived for her to make her first profession. Alas! that it should cost her so much to make it to her own dear husband; alas! that this should be the sole reserve between them, who should be of one spirit, as they were, by God's holy ordinance of marriage, of one flesh!

She was still weak, and when she tried to speak, the tears would rise and choke her voice; at length she whispered, "Philip, dear! I have made my choice; I cannot live any

longer to myself alone; I have learned to love Christ—I must serve Him; will you help me?"

"As to helping you, dear, I am afraid I cannot, in the way you mean," was the quiet and rather dry reply, and there was undoubtedly a shade of annoyance in his tone, which Edith's keen perception immediately detected. He continued, "You know, my love, I cannot see the thing as you see it; you speak as if you were a thoroughly irreligious person, whereas I think you have had quite as much religion as any one could desire, ever since I had the happiness of meeting you. We both go to chapel twice every Sunday, and you very often attend the week-night service; we give as much as we can afford to good causes, and you visit the poor, and are kind to little children; you obey the dictates of conscience, and I hope I may say I do also, though my conscience may be less tender than yours: and what more can be desired? I really think, my darling, more than this would border upon sanctimoniousness;—surely an upright life, a cheerful contented spirit, and a due observance of the ordinances of religion must be quite sufficient?"

"Not quite, dear husband," said Edith, gathering strength as she spoke—the strength she had inly prayed might be granted to her in this hour of her need. "It is not enough to do all you have mentioned; nay, ten times as much would avail us nothing before God's righteous tribunal. I never knew, till now, the full meaning of that verse we so often sing at chapel:—

> 'Not the labour of my hands,
> Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
> Could my tears for ever flow,
> Could my zeal no languor know,
> All for sin could not atone,
> Thou must save, and Thou alone.'

O, my dear Philip, do believe me; indeed it is not enough to live morally, and to join in the services of the sanctuary, unless we are one with Christ—unless we are united to Him in a living faith—unless we love Him supremely, and strive, however feebly, to glorify Him in all we do and say, and even

think, we are none of His; and if we are *not His*, we have not, and cannot have, any place in that happy home where He dwells, with all His children, whose earthly trials are over. Indeed, dear, it is so! I feel it in my heart. I have found the truth, and I must show it to you, my dearest one on earth! The pearl of great price is mine, and I shall never rest till it is yours also!"

"Then, dearest, you will make me, and yourself also, extremely uncomfortable, for I tell you candidly I cannot at all agree with you. I should be very sorry to be a really irreligious person; but as for giving myself up to continual praying, and whining, and psalm-singing, it is out of the question; my sense and my taste alike revolt from such a course of life. Hitherto, my dear, we have been one in all things, and we have been as happy as any married people could be; do not let any superstitious and exaggerated notions about an ideal saintliness come between us. If you will make yourself unhappy by a morbid religionism, I cannot help it, though I shall be extremely sorry; but, for myself, I am quite contented to remain as I am. I thank God for all His mercies; I do unto others as I would be done by; I am no Sabbath-breaker; and you say yourself that I am a good husband and a good master—what more do you wish?"

Edith did not speak; the tears she would have given worlds to restrain, fell fast; she felt so weak in body, and it was so hard to oppose Philip, as in some sort she felt she must do, if she were faithful to the vows she had made on her bed of sickness. She could only shake her head and keep silence, and by a strenuous effort hold back the flood of passionate weeping that was ready to burst forth, did she relax in the least the stern control she was maintaining over her excited feelings. She was afraid he would think it all impulsive agitation, a mere woman's hysterical passion, which might have been called forth for anything or nothing; she dared not trust herself to repeat what she had said before, and she felt, too, how ignorant she was herself, and how little qualified to act as teacher, where the lesson to be given involved results so momentous.

Again Philip spoke, and this time with an irritation for which he hated himself, while he would not strive to repress it. "I am a good Dissenter, and that is enough!"

"No," she said at last, after some minutes' silence, during which she had become calmer; "no, my dear husband, being a Dissenter is nothing to the point. Of course, with your views, you ought to be a Dissenter; but it is not the mere clinging to any creed or sect, it is not the observance or non-observance of rites, that can make a man safe with God. We shall never be asked to what section of the Church Militant we belonged; the question, the one question will be, whether we belong to Christ, whether our sins are washed away in His blood, whether we call Him Lord and Master. To be found in Christ, not to be found in any particular church, is the great thing. O! Philip dear, you have heard our minister say this a hundred times."

"It is his business, my dear. I don't say it disrespectfully, but it is his work, for which he is paid, and from him we expect it; but I don't want my own happy little wife turned into a preacher. And now, Edie love, let us say no more about it. I suppose your religion will not teach you that you need cease caring whether or not you please your husband. Kiss me, darling, and think no more about it. I am afraid I have been a little cross; we will never hold such a discussion again. There, dry your eyes, little woman, and take up that small specimen of humanity you think so much of. She must be getting stronger, for she squalls like any ordinary baby, and I do think her fingers are less like claws, and her face less like my grandmother's, in the last days of her existence. I believe she will be a tidy little daughter after all."

And Philip poked the fire vigorously, and tried, by an assumed hilarity and by many tender caresses, to banish from Edith's mind the subject on which they had so widely and so unhappily diverged.

CHAPTER X.

RETURNING HEALTH.

In a day or two came news from Redcliffe House; Isabel had a son—"a magnificent child,"—as doctor, and nurse, and everybody else averred. She was doing wonderfully well, so well that no one could feel anything beyond the most ordinary anxiety on her behalf; and as for the baby, he kicked, and crowed, and cried, and stared at the candle as if he had been launched on this troublous tide of mortal life for a month, instead of a mere matter of twenty-four hours. Edith rejoiced most sincerely in her friend's good fortune; but as from day to day came accounts of Mrs. Haughton's rapid recovery, she could not help sighing a little over her own prolonged illness, which she feared would prove so much more expensive than they could afford; and her weakness naturally re-acted upon itself, for her physical feebleness made her fret a good deal, though in a quiet way, as day after day passed on without much increase of strength; and the loss of her usual buoyancy did not by any means tend to accelerate her progress. Nevertheless poor Edith was devoutly thankful: though still so weak and ailing—and she sometimes feared she might never be strong again—she was restored to life, for a time at least; she was not snatched away without pardon and without hope; and if it pleased God to prolong her days there would be many opportunities of serving Him and living to His praise and glory. Then there was the sweet prospect of training her little one; for Edith never believed but that its life would be spared; and the still dearer hope of influencing Philip, of watching, and praying, and waiting, till he too should be fain to cast in his lot with the people of God, and to tread with her the narrow way that leadeth to everlasting life. She felt that she could never be happy so long as she and her husband

were treading different, and increasingly divergent roads; and she felt too how circumspect must be her own walk and conversation—how consistent her daily life—if she would constrain Philip by her example and influence to seek those things which could alone bring true peace and lasting satisfaction.

She came down-stairs first on Sunday. Philip went to chapel; he took great pride and pleasure in being always in his pew, and always punctual in his attendance both morning and evening; he had a perfect horror of walking up the aisle after the minister had issued from the vestry. During Edith's severe illness he had, of course, remained with her; but now that she was so much better there was no reason that he should absent himself from the services of the sanctuary; not even for her, he whispered to himself with proud complacency, would he be tempted to neglect his religious duties; and so in the drizzling rain, which was fast washing away the last remains of the dirty, slippery snow, he sallied forth, after brushing his hat and coat with scrupulous care, and kissing Edith again and again, and bidding her take every possible care of herself till he came back again.

Edith did not mean to rise for some time, and she lay still, thinking of many things, while the unconscious little one slumbered on her arm. On the bed lay her Bible, and one or two devotional books which she was now learning to prize very highly. She began by reading some of the Psalms, commencing at the 102nd, and going on to the end of the 108th. The first notes of the Psalmist were in a sad, low, minor key, that accorded well with the depression that, in spite of every effort, had stolen over her as she listened to Philip's receding footsteps on the stairs. The Psalm was headed, "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord."

"That will suit me," she said, as she settled her Bible in the best light; "far better than the more triumphal strains that I used to think so animating and so cheerful." Further on she read, "My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations. He

weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days; thy years are throughout all generations." Such had been her first faint prayer, when, roused from that deathlike trance, she dimly discerned the danger in which she lay. "Take me not away in the midst of my days," had been the very words in which her trembling voiceless supplication had ascended to Him in whose kind Fatherly hands are all the issues of life and death. And had not God listened to her agonized entreaty? Had He not raised her up from what had seemed, to all even more than to herself, a bed of death? Was not strength in some measure slowly returning? Was she not once more about to mingle with her family in common household ways? Surely her Father, who had granted her longer life, and, still more, the pardon of all her sins, would give her strength for all needs in the days to come. Surely the life she owed to Him would be His especial care, and surely must it be henceforth devoted to His service, and to His praise and glory.

Something of the spirit of the next Psalm possessed her heart as she read its opening verses—"Bless the Lord, O my soul!" &c.; and as the strain of praise mounted higher and higher, she could ascend with it, even to the jubilant adoration of the 107th and 108th Psalms. She could say fervently, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men;" and—"O God! my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory!"

When wearied at last with, but not of, her sweet employment, she let the Bible slip from her weak fingers; she wondered what had become of the despondency with which, all sadly and languidly, she had opened the sacred pages. Though feeling very tired and feeble, she was greatly comforted, and so strengthened in her soul that she could only marvel, and give thanks. And from that hour her faith was stronger, her hope brighter, and her views of Christ, and of His incomparable work of redemption, clearer and yet clearer, as the days and weeks of trial passed away in chequered shade and sunshine.

Then the babe awoke, and in soothing it her whole heart was filled with an indescribable yearning for its spiritual welfare. Looking down on its pale, tiny face, and laying her hand on its little bosom, she solemnly devoted it to the Lord; resolving, in the strength which she knew might be hers if sought in humble faith, to bring it up for God, to train it for Christ, to seek for it, before all earthly weal and joy, that inheritance which is promised to the saints in light.

And still, as the morning imperceptibly wore away, she remained in prayer for her babe, that it might indeed be numbered with the heirs of eternal life. "Take her, O Father," was her earnest cry. "Take her, and seal her for Thine own. Withhold what Thou wilt of earthly blessing, if it be Thy will, but give her a name and a place among Thy children; grant her Thy peace, Thy joy; let her be, even from this hour, filled with Thy Spirit, and taught of Thee. In life and in death, let her be Thine."

Years afterwards, Edith remembered that prayer; for there came a time when she knew that it had been heard and answered in every particular.

She had not finished dressing when Philip returned. O! what sunshine his face brought into her quiet chamber! how pleasant it was to hear his voice! Edith's new affections did not make her an indifferent wife. Though she had learned now to love her Saviour, her husband was dear as ever, nay, far dearer it seemed to her, for now her heart was full of yearning anxiety on his behalf, and such a care as hers must always intensify affection towards one's best beloved. He came in, looking so bright and so handsome, and so glad to see her once again on the way to resume her old habits; and he sat down while she finished her toilet, and told her what a splendid sermon Mr. Stanton had given them, concluding by saying, "He is indeed a splendid fellow; such matter, such masterly argument, such eloquence, such a voice, and such an intonation! There is not another man in Liverpool, either in the denomination or out of it, who could have preached that sermon. I am very proud of him, I can tell you. I think it quite a distinction to belong to the Laurel-street congregation

—you get status by hearing such a man; and as for the intellect, you must wilfully set yourself against improvement if you fail to profit by his discourses."

"Indeed, I think so too; and the intellectual profit is by no means the best part of what one may gain by his ministrations. I never heard any one set forth the way of salvation so simply, so clearly, and so unfettered by human inventions and reasonings. Yes, he certainly says the very best things in the very best way, and his own life is in accordance with the holy truths he strives to impress upon his hearers—but, Philip dear, it is a serious responsibility to hear such sermons, is it not?"

"I suppose it is," he replied, carelessly, and in that peculiarly dry tone which always made Edith's heart sink within her—it was a tone which indicated a disinclination to pursue the subject under discussion—a tone, too, which evidenced no inconsiderable annoyance, though he flattered himself that he invariably concealed from his wife all evidence of his discomfiture. Worst of all, it was a tone never heard save when vital religion was the theme of conversation.

He would not speak further about the sermon he had heard; but began to tell what inquiries had been made about her health, and about the baby, and who had promised to come and see them as soon as she could prudently see her friends. And then, Edith being quite ready, he gave her his arm, and guided her trembling footsteps down the narrow staircase, and led her into the sitting-room. The excitement was almost more than her weak frame could bear; her breath came and went in short gasps, and her face, already lily-white, became more deathlike in its hue. For one minute Philip feared that her partial recovery had been only an illusion; he felt by how precarious a tenure she still remained his own, and a spasm of agony convulsed his heart. After all, would she fade away and leave him? Surely natural causes were not sufficient to account for this continued feebleness; by this time she ought to be nearly if not quite strong again. Certainly, the sickly baby was a great care, and sometimes it cried incessantly, and wearied its mother

very much; but even maternal solicitude, however painful, did not adequately explain this tardy and uncertain convalescence.

Edith saw the pain in her husband's face, and she strove her utmost to gain her equilibrium; and soon her composure returned, and she smiled, and said, she was very silly to be so easily upset, but it was over now, and there was nothing the matter!

And so Philip was half re-assured, and he pretended to be satisfied, but he kept jealous watch and ward over her for the rest of the day; yet, when bedtime came, it was evident that she was really the better for the exertion. The next morning she ventured down-stairs earlier, and when Philip looked in to see if the fire burned clearly, and if the room were ready for her reception, he found her already established on the sofa, with baby in her pretty berceaunette on the hearth, and some little task of needlework in her hands. It was quite reviving to see her engaged once more in her wonted occupations.

And no one rejoiced at Mrs. Proctor's return to ordinary occupations more than little Matty, who was quite eager for nurse to go, that she might prove her own skill in dandling and amusing the baby; and O! the pride with which she anticipated the days of spring, or at least the mild weather, when she might be trusted to carry that phenomenon, the baby, round and round the neighbouring square.

She tossed her head with indignation and scorn when nurse told her in confidence that little miss was the shabbiest baby she had ever tended in her life; and her wrath fairly blazed out one day when she overheard nurse, who was trying to still the little creature's piteous wailing, say, "Ah well! poor dear! it can't be helped; you're the poorest little bundle of skin and bone that ever I dressed; but you're not long for this world. I hope the good Lord 'ill take you soon, and not keep you here in your pain and misery!" Matty could not stand this at all; she thought the baby a perfect beauty. "For her part, she couldn't abide them big, fat, common-looking babies, that seemed for all the world like little show beasts, rather than young human creatures! And

as for the Lord taking it, she should think, leastways, He didn't mean it to be helped back again to Himself"—a dark inuendo, of which nurse happily did not comprehend the drift, or there would have been fierce warfare in Edith's small kingdom. Matty really kept a stern watch upon nurse's proceedings, lest she should assist her poor little charge to make the transit that she seemed to think so desirable. She, like Edith, never doubted but that baby would live and grow up into a great girl; but, as day after day passed on, Edith began to question whether she ever would thrive; it seemed but too probable that her little darling would never be strong, and healthy, and sprightly, like other little ones. Its waxy complexion, its strange though beautiful eyes, its care-worn expression, and its poor shrunk and limp little limbs, all bespoke a sadly enfeebled constitution; and once, when Edith, in the hope of stilling her own fears and doubts, asked the kind doctor whether all were right with the spine, he would not give her any definite answer, but murmured with assumed carelessness something about "want of power," and the impossibility of pronouncing a decided opinion in the case of so young and delicate a child.

While Matty thought of the embroidered, dove-coloured cashmere cloak, and the tiny white hood, with its swansdown trimming, in which little Missy was to figure as soon as the weather would permit her to be taken an airing, Edith mused painfully on the life of suffering that might be before her precious child, should she indeed live to grow up to woman's estate. It was indeed a trial of faith.

Towards the end of that week Edith had a visit from Edwin Haughton; he had a long gossip with Philip over the counter, and then, hearing that Mrs. Proctor was in the sitting-room, begged to be allowed to carry back his personal impressions to Isabel, who was extremely uneasy about her friend's protracted weakness. He came charged with a message which he wished to deliver verbally. Christmas Day was close at hand, and though Isabel was really quite well, and equal to anything and everything, her doctor and nurse had declared that she must keep quiet till the new year had

fairly begun; and so Christmas was not to be observed by any exciting festivities. But Isabel had declared that nothing should keep her a solitary prisoner in her own house; she was better, she averred, than she had ever been in her life, and, though she did not care for company in general, she could not be moped to death; and she was dying to see Edith, and she knew the change would do Edith all the good in the world —so she and her husband and the baby must come and spend Christmas Day at Redcliffe House; and, if Edith liked, she and Isabel should dine together cozily and quietly in the dressing-room, while the gentlemen, including old Mr. Clive, and Estelle, should have the dining-room to themselves. And that there might be no difficulty, the close carriage was to be in Myrtle-place by eleven o'clock, and Edith was to wrap herself up in everything she had that was wearable and warm, and baby was to be wrapped up also, and they were all to spend a long day together, and admire each other's children, and have a good talk about things in general.

At first Edith felt inclined to demur: Christmas Day was, as you will remember, her wedding-day, and she wanted to spend it very quietly with her husband; then her baby was no beauty, and Isabel's was, and she naturally shrank from exposing her poor little maid to invidious comparisons. But Edwin urged, and Philip, who thought the visit would be an excellent thing for his wife, threw his weight into the scale; and Edith besides really wished to see and talk with Isabel: and so it came to pass that the matter was settled, and Mr. Haughton went home to tell his wife that Philip and Edith and the baby would dine with them on Christmas Day.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SKELETON IN THE CUPBOARD.

WHEN Christmas Day arrived, the snow lay deep on the ground; the cold was intense, but the air was as clear as keen, and the sun, shining on the bare frost-encrusted boughs, transformed them into jewelled branches, sparkling all over with pearls and diamonds, and divers precious stones. Edith dressed herself and her baby, as Isabel had advised, in all their warmest wraps; and looking out on the pleasant sunshine, and listening once more to the merry Christmas bells, that reminded her so forcibly of that day twelvemonths, and perceiving, beyond doubt, that baby was looking a little—just a little less meagre and pinched, she felt cheered and brightened, and quite ready to enjoy the day at Redcliffe House.

Philip came up-stairs just as mamma and her little daughter were ready. He had in his hand a pasteboard box, which looked as if it might possibly contain a new bonnet, and the sight of it made Edith say directly, "Why, Philip, what have you there?"

"Ah, what, indeed!" he returned. "Guess, Edie; for it concerns you. It is your Christmas-box, and your wedding present, all in one. What is it, think you?"

"Nay, I cannot tell: but thank you, dearest, whatever it may be—so good of you to think of me! Only I hope it is not a new bonnet, because I have made this one, that I had on new last Christmas Day, look so pretty and jaunty, with fresh ribbons and lace, that I am really quite set up for the winter."

"It is *not* a new bonnet, Mrs. Proctor; guess again."

"Something for baby then!" said Edith, looking extremely charmed at the idea.

"You absurd little woman! what could I buy for that diminutive thing that she has not?—a rattle would be the most appropriate present for her. Guess again. You cannot? Well, I really thought you gifted with more imagination, and you have not half curiosity enough for a woman! There now! what do you think of these things—muff, and what d'ye call it?" And Philip carefully unpacked an ermine muff, and boa to match.

"O! Philip, the very thing I coveted; only I never for a moment thought of having them. You extravagant man, how could you spend so much upon me, after I have been such an expense too? I quite dread the sight of Doctor Delany's bill."

"Never mind the doctor's bill to-day, Edie; and as for the expense, it could not be helped. I have not had one extravagant fit since we were married; surely I may please myself once in a way, and remind my wife that it is her wedding-day, and Christmas time to boot. Besides, you silly little puss, how do you know they are not mere imitations of ermine,—spurious impositions, French rabbit-skins, or Cheshire cat-skins, to wit?"

"Do you suppose I am not woman enough to discern between the genuine article and a plausible sham?" said Edith, stroking the sleek, snowy fur, and paying her husband in something more appreciable even than her warm, affectionate thanks.

There was a rattle of wheels at the door, and Matty, who was highly elated at the honour of going to Mrs. Haughton's, as little Missy's nursemaid, rushed down in her best plaid shawl, and her bran-new bonnet, with its cherry-coloured ribbons all flying, eager to carry baby, and her mistress's shawl and reticule, and everything else that could possibly require carrying into the "coach-and-four," as she still persisted in calling the Haughton equipage. Matty had never before travelled in anything more aristocratic than an omnibus.

Through the streets, whence all the snow had been swept away, and along the pleasant West Derby-road, where it yet lay, glittering like diamonds in the sunshine, they took their

way, and baby was considerate enough not to cry much; and Edith, feeling stronger and better than she had been for many days, was in excellent spirits, and her sweet face was radiant with happiness. Philip, looking at her as she was bending over the little one, was struck with the bright but calm expression of her countenance: there was something in her aspect that filled him with surprise, for he had never noted it before, even when her health and strength were unimpaired, and her spirits generally buoyant. He did not know, he could not understand, the peace that had taken possession of her soul—that filled her whole heart, and shed its calm impress on her countenance, in spite of many fears, and doubts, and apprehensions. What recked he of the sweet and solemn promise of peace to the heart that rests upon God alone? Alas! he was yet in the bonds of sin unconfessed, and therefore unrepented; he indeed acknowledged himself to be a sinner in common with all mankind, and he believed that through Christ men were saved from the penalty of their shortcomings; but as for owning to any particular frailties of his own—as for feeling any deep or personal interest in Christ's work of redemption—it was far from him.

And so he wondered greatly at the change that had passed over Edith since her illness; the grave sweetness of her face brought to his mind something he had read somewhere, about some one who, looking onwards through the long dim vista of coming years, saw before her waves upon waves of sorrow, wild storms of grief, shadows of death, and darkness, and desolation; and, beyond all, an infinite calm, a brightness serene and eternal, unfluctuating as immortal.

But the short journey was soon accomplished, and the carriage rolled through the gates of Redcliffe House and along the drive, whence the snow had been carefully swept away; but in all its unsullied purity it still lay on lawn, and bank, and terrace—one sheet of dazzling whiteness, broken only by the drooping evergreens, and the dark sweeping boughs of the lordly cedar. Within the house all was warmth and cheer; the hall-door was open, ready to receive them, and a little in the background stood Mr.

Haughton himself; he came forward, however, immediately, and assisted Edith to alight, shaking hands vehemently with Philip, and declaring that it was the greatest charity in the world to come and relieve the intolerable dullness of their family circle, seeing they were all bored to death for want of something fresh and original.

Edith thought how little she should have liked her husband to complain to his friend of the dullness of their own fireside. Philip replied—"Dull, are you? Well, that is a complaint we are never troubled with in Myrtle-place. I am afraid, however, as both myself and my wife are remarkably quiet people, we shall not contribute much in the way of originality."

"Indeed the monotony is insufferable!" lisped forth a sweet voice close at hand. Philip turned round, and there stood Miss Drummond, looking her loveliest in a new fashionable dress, with sprays of holly twined in her rich shining masses of golden brown hair. "I do hope," she continued, addressing herself to Edith, "you will do Isabel good; she wants rousing; she really does. I am quite uneasy about her, I assure you."

"I thought," returned Edith, "that Isabel was almost well again. I am sorry—"

"She is as strong as I am at this moment, and stronger, I do believe," interrupted Estelle—"the thing is, she keeps upstairs, as if she were only just convalescent: she mopes and muses, and will not hear a word about visitors or going out. I tell her it is a duty she owes to society, not to seclude herself in her own apartments—but she will not listen to me. I hope you may have more influence, Mrs. Proctor."

"What if I use my influence in the opposite direction?" asked Edith, feeling desperately annoyed with the fair Estelle for thus taking her cousin to task in her own house, and in her absence too, and without any ceremony or hesitation. "I think Mrs. Haughton is very wise: even if she be strong enough to return prudently to her ordinary habits, which I greatly doubt, the dear baby must occupy all her time. The mother's heart is better satisfied with baby's little winning

ways, and with its incessant wants, than with all the gaieties the world can furnish."

"O! certainly," replied Estelle; "I suppose one must make due allowance for maternal enthusiasm; but everything, even our virtues, you know, ought to be practised in moderation. But I am keeping you all this time standing."

Philip thought she might have remembered that before. He was on the point of hinting that Edith had better go upstairs, and carry on the discussion in comfort with Isabel present to defend herself; he, too, thought it strange that Miss Drummond should criticise her cousin's course of conduct so cavalierly while Edwin himself was standing by. He felt quite sure that no one would have ventured to discuss his wife in his presence; certainly no one would have done so unreproved, either by word or look.

Isabel received Edith with more than her usual warmth; she came to meet her with all her characteristic impetuosity of manner, loaded her with caresses, and finally burst into tears. Edith was alarmed, and gently chid her for not controlling emotions that could not fail to injure her if unchecked and unrestrained.

"I am a foolish creature, I know," said Isabel, wiping her eyes, and struggling for composure; "but don't scold me, darling Edith. Ah! if you did but know what a comfort it is to me to look at your dear face once more! I was afraid I should never see those clear truth-telling brown eyes again. I wanted to come when you were so ill, but they would not let me; and indeed, I never knew the worst, till I was beginning to get well myself; they had so much consideration for me." There was intense bitterness in the tone in which the last few words were spoken; but Edith thought it better not to notice it. Presently Isabel, after fondling her friend with increased tenderness, burst forth again, "I think you love me, Edith; tell me, do you?"

"Indeed, I do!" replied Edith, warmly, wondering at Isabel's excited manner. She did really love the warm-hearted impulsive creature sitting by her side, and holding her hand at that moment with all a lover's fondness; but like

most other women who are happily married, the affection of her friend was in no wise essential to her happiness. She was pleased that Isabel should love her so well; but she felt that, as regarded their mutual devotion to each other, she must perforce "give a wave and take a sea." Philip's love was all-sufficient for her. Safely resting on his true manly heart, she could well dispense with all other earthly loves. In him and in her little child all her tenderness was centred; on this side heaven, she needed nothing, craved for nothing more.

Not so Isabel; she was one of those passionate creatures who, beneath a cold and stately bearing towards an unsympathizing world, conceal depths unfathomable of strong emotions; she was one whose heart could never be satisfied unless she were first and best-beloved by some other human heart. She craved for love; she yearned for true, pure affection, and finding it not where she had a right to expect it in all its purity, fervour, and fulness, she tried to appease the needs of her nature by attaching herself to a friend whom she could trust, and towards whom she was drawn by many circumstances. Poor Isabel! denied the warmth and gladness of the lordly sun, she was fain to cheer herself in the paler, colder rays of the placid moon.

"I am so glad you love me, Edith," she said at last; "nay, do not think I am acting the sentimental school-girl; but I cannot live without some love, and yours is all I have—yes, *all*, Edie!" And again she began to weep, though very quietly.

"Hush! hush, dear!" said Edith, inexpressibly shocked; "you have your husband and that dear little baby; and that reminds me, Isabel, I am longing to see the darling, which is, I think, very generous on my part, seeing, or rather hearing, that yours is a regular show-baby, and mine as poor and shabby a little maiden as ever came into this troublesome world."

"Yes, I have my baby," replied Isabel; "I hope he may grow up to love his mother; but at present I cannot expect much from him; he does not even know me from the nurse. It is his father who *ought* to love me, and cheer my solitude,

and be my chief companion. O! why did I ever marry? Marriage is indeed a lottery; I have often heard it called so by wise, elderly people, and now I prove the truth of the assertion: and you, dear, have drawn a prize and I a blank. Heigho! it is of no use to fret; I should have been wiser. I heard nurse quoting another old saw yesterday, 'As you make your bed so you must lie upon it;' it may be a homely proverb, and rather vulgar, no doubt, but it is wonderfully expressive. One makes up a bed of roses, and another a bed of thorns or stinging-nettles; but the bed being made there is no such thing as changing it; and so it is perfectly senseless to cry out, even if the thorns do tear one, and the nettles sting. I for one will not when I am stronger; for in spite of all Edwin and Estelle say, I am not quite myself yet; and seeing you, dear Edith, has unnerved me a little. I shall be all right soon."

"Yes, dear," said Edith, gently. "But about these metaphorical beds that we are all making. I hold that they are seldom, if ever, irremediably made. If, as you hint, yours is not of roses—and, indeed, your case would be singular if it were—do you not think you might do something to render it more comfortable, though your utmost efforts may fail to make it a couch of luxury?"

"Perhaps I might, if you were always with me to check me when I go wrong, and to soothe me when I am almost beside myself with just anger and indignation. But no! no! it can never be now, Edith; romantic girls and sentimental poets tell you—

'It is the bitterest of all pain
To love, nor be beloved again.'

And high-class novelists would say, 'Not so. Such pangs time may soothe; discipline in the end bears precious fruit.' Unrequited love is positive pleasure compared with that misery which mourns over a dethroned idol. To continue to love that which can no longer secure our esteem is the 'bitterest of all pain.' But I tell you, Edith, even that pain is exceeded by another. Think what it must be to find that

you have never loved a real living creature—that you have given all the treasures of your heart to a sham, a cheat, a myth, a being that, after all, never was a veritable being, only a delusion of your own fevered fancy. There remains, indeed, the outward semblance of the humanity that once so charmed your young foolish imagination; but for the reality of the inner man you seek in vain. You have absolutely loved a phantom—an ideal—the mere creation of your own brain. How clever we women are at idealizing! but sooner or later we find out our mistake, and laugh at the delusion."

Edith shuddered at the tone and at the dreary laugh with which poor Isabel ended; she scarcely knew what to say; of course, she understood all that Mrs. Haughton intended to convey, but she could scarcely tell how far she was justified in the conclusions at which she had so painfully arrived. Whether Edwin Haughton was or was not the mere deception his wife supposed, Edith could not possibly determine; from many little things which she had herself noted, she thought it might be so; but then, knowing as she did Isabel's impetuous disposition, and her proud, hasty temper, which one unkindly word could excite, and one glance or tone of affection could subdue, she thought it very probable there might be faults on both sides. And what might be Miss Drummond's share in the misapprehensions between the husband and wife, was a very serious question indeed. Isabel evidently disliked her, and shunned her; why, then, was she an inmate of Redcliffe House? Of one thing Edith was certain—Isabel and her husband frequently came into collision, and, whenever this was so, Estelle Drummond, to say the best of it, did not act the part of a peacemaker. And yet she would appear, to an undiscriminating person, to be doing her utmost to heal the breach; she had soft words and blandishments always at command; but beneath all her assumed gentleness there was an undercurrent of malice and sarcasm; and her most flattering remarks were distinguished by skilful side-thrusts, uttered in the sweetest and most honied of accents, and directed with an unerring skill, a delicacy, an amount of what seemed wonderfully like intuitive simplicity, that did as much credit

to her ability, as discredit to her womanly character. She had the unenviable talent of being able to say the bitterest things in the quietest way, and to wrap them up in a form of words that might be taken for compliments, so as to puzzle one as to where the offence of her speech actually lay; and when her malevolent remarks came to be repeated, even by the injured party who had winced under her covert satire, it was difficult to trace in them any just cause of displeasure. Isabel said that every hasty word, look, or action; every small mistake, every trifling error of hers, was observed by Estelle, and invariably brought under discussion in Mr. Haughton's presence, and that with so much tact, and such delicate address, that it would appear to a stranger that she was aiming at something very remote from her own discomfiture, being perfectly unconscious of giving pain, or exposing weakness, or of causing mischief between the two, with whom she had no business to interfere. "O! if she would only speak out honestly!" said Isabel, sadly; "then I could defend myself, for I am no coward; but when I do flare out, she looks so confounded, so innocently injured, and protests she means nothing of the kind; and Edwin says I am so suspicious and vixenish; and he quotes the old proverb about a guilty conscience needing no accuser, and so I get the worst of it: for really her words are nothing in themselves; and when I recall them, I sometimes think myself I must have done her an injustice. However, the mischief has occurred too often for me to be mistaken. I do not suppose she ever makes complaints against me in my absence, and yet I am sure her influence tells. O Edith! never let her prejudice you against me. She is so specious, so apparently kind and simple!"

Just then the baby awoke, and Isabel sprang up to exhibit him: he was indeed a splendid little fellow, such a contrast to poor Edith's tiny blossom; although Isabel would not allow that she was half as shabby a specimen of babyhood as she had been led to expect. Then came on inquiries respecting names, and Edith explained that her little daughter was to be called Mary, after Philip's mother; and Isabel said that

her son was already registered as Alfred Edwin Haughton. Afterwards Isabel brought forward a Christmas present for little Miss Mary; a splendidly-worked muslin robe, in which she looked more shrunken than ever. But Edith was delighted; it was very kind of Isabel, and she was far from insensible to the pleasure of seeing her baby arrayed in costly raiment: she was a thorough woman after all. As for Matty, she almost cried for joy, at the prospect of little Missy's grandeur.

CHAPTER XII.

SUNDAY EVENING IN MYRTLE-PLACE.

THAT Christmas Day visit did Edith a great deal of good: certainly she was very tired when she found herself once more in her own little parlour, the hands of the clock pointing to midnight; and Philip was angry with himself for allowing her to remain so long; but then they had returned as they came, in the close carriage, and baby had slept peacefully during the short journey, and for some hours before, in Isabel's warm, snug nursery: and the next day, though feeling somewhat fatigued, Edith was none the worse, and the child was unwontedly good; and as the old year wore out, and the new year stole upon them, Mr. Proctor saw the colour once more returning, though faintly, to the cheek that had worn not long ago what seemed to be a mortal paleness. Though Edith never recovered her girlish bloom, she now began to regain strength steadily; and soon she was able to go in and out, and attend to all her duties, with her accustomed energy and cheerfulness.

And now that she was able to go to chapel once again, she began to consider how to carry into execution the plans upon which she had resolved in the long weary days of her tedious recovery. Privately, and in her own heart, she had given

herself to Christ; she had been living now for many weeks the life of an earnest Christian; and deep and continual was the communion between God and her own soul. But this was not sufficient: having received pardon and peace, having taken the Lord Jesus Christ for her Saviour, her King, her Master, it behoved her to stand forth, and declare, in the sight of all men, what God had wrought in her behalf. She knew that she had passed from death unto life; she knew that old things had passed away, that all things had become new; that the pleasures of this world had lost their power to charm, while private prayer and praise and the services of the sanctuary were now her supreme delight: therefore must she publicly make profession of her faith, and join herself in communion to a Christian church.

And yet it cost her no small effort to decide upon her immediate profession; for she knew instinctively that Philip would be annoyed at the bond thus formed—a bond in which he could not and would not participate. The subject of religion was scarcely ever mentioned between them: in everything else there was perfect confidence and thorough unreserve; only on this momentous topic, was there silence and hesitation between the two, who in all else were one in heart. It was not Edith's fault; often she strove to speak of that which was now so near her heart; but Philip always replied in that tone that made her so sad, and as quickly as possible changed the theme of conversation. But now she must hesitate no longer; if she held back, for fear of displeasing her husband, she was loving him more than Christ; she was not taking up her cross; she was ashamed of her Master.

So one Sunday evening she plunged boldly into the subject. She could not attend the evening service while her baby was so young, and so delicate; and Philip, having a severe cold, was staying at home as a matter of prudence. Little Mary was undressed, and asleep in her berceaunette up-stairs, and Matty was keeping watch over her, so that the master and mistress of the house were likely to enjoy their Sabbath evening leisure undisturbed. Edith felt herself getting very nervous, when, the fire made up, and the hearth swept—Edith

never forgot Miss Wilson's lesson—Philip drew up his own chair and gently placed her in the corner of the couch, clearly ready for a "comfortable talk," as he always called a quiet hour of conversation with his wife. It was of no use to beat about the bush; useless to think of leading the conversation into the channel she desired; her heart only beat more and more painfully as the moments sped by, and her confession was still to make. At length she said, with apparent calmness, and with a courage at which she was fairly surprised, "Philip, dearest, I have something to tell you: I am going to see Mr. Stanton this week; I wish to be proposed for church membership at the next church meeting."

"Indeed!" was all the answer she received; but that one cold, almost stern word of pretended surprise spoke volumes; it made her heart sink within her.

She went on. "I have too long, dear, deferred coming to this decision; and I feel that it is but a poor return for the mercies I have received, thus to linger in publicly dedicating myself to the service of Christ. I can wait no longer; I *must* obey the commands of my Master, who has said, 'Do this in remembrance of me;' and O, Philip love, if you knew how sweet a thing it is to yield implicit obedience to One who has loved you with such a love, One to whom you owe all joy, all blessing, you would not wonder at my earnest desire to participate in *all* the privileges of the Christian life. Indeed, love!" and she spoke quite imploringly now, his countenance wore so rigid and impassive an expression—"I cannot help it; I cannot even in outward semblance deny my Master; I *must* make this profession."

"Very well," was Philip's quiet answer; "you need not use that pleading tone, my dear; I am not thinking of preventing you doing that on which you have set your heart. By all means see Mr. Stanton, and propose yourself for church membership. The sooner the better, I should say, since you have made up your mind about it."

"But you do not quite like it, Philip?" she replied, timidly. If she had made any other proposition in the world, even if it were to do something which he thoroughly

disapproved, she knew his tone would be softer, kinder, more cordial. "I am sure you are not altogether pleased with me; indeed, if it were anything else, I would not think of it; your wishes are law to me, I hope you know that, Philip?"

"Except in the present instance, my dear; however, let us say no more about it. As to *liking* the step you are about to take, I cannot honestly say I do. I think you are very well as you are: you are a thoroughly religious woman; I would not have married you had I believed you otherwise, for a woman without religion is as hateful, as revolting as a woman without modesty. Can you not be satisfied to go on as you have begun? Let your religion be between God and your own soul; why parade it in the eyes of the world? Besides, I tell you candidly, Edie, I cannot bear the idea of your engaging in work and entering upon engagements in which I am to have no share. Our interests will no longer be identical; you will be for ever trotting off to church meetings, and maternal meetings; you will be always dorcasing or district visiting, or taking the chair at some—some—tiresome" —Philip was going to say "infernal," only he restrained himself—"some tiresome Babel of a ladies' committee, and I shall half lose my bright little wife, who has made my home and hearth the pleasantest, dearest, sweetest spot in all the world. But do as you like, my dear."

"O, Philip!" said Edith, grieved at his words, and yet more grieved at the tone in which they were spoken, "how can you say such things? God helping me, I will never desert my home for any public call, unless you, dearest, counsel it; and I trust I shall never neglect any private duty, even to serve the church to which I belong. I think, dear, my right place is here, by your side; my great work in life now is ministering to your comfort, making you happy as far as I can, and being a good, wise, tender mother to the little darling God has sent us. No! do not fear; so far my religion has taught me to attend with greater strictness than ever to my home duties. Once I did many things right in themselves, because it pleased me to do them; now I feel more than ever, how imperatively

I am called to the same actions, the same solicitudes, and from a motive far higher than any by which I have hitherto been actuated."

"What higher motive could you have than that of making your home happy? What higher ambition than that of being your husband's dearest treasure, his wise and gentle counsellor, his *help-meet*, as God Himself has willed it?"

Edith was silent. At length she summoned courage enough to say—"Nothing higher, either in motive or ambition, could I find; only my love for you, for our child, must be founded on a love still higher and purer. I do wish, above all things—it is the dearest wish of my heart—to be a good, true wife. But I know now I can never be that unless I love Christ. O Philip, do not look so hard and cold."

"Nonsense! I am only trying to catch your exact meaning; your words are rather enigmatical to a man of my simple understanding. I hear you say you cannot be true to me unless you love Christ. Well, it seems to me that that is a mere sentiment, the peculiar language of ultra-religionists, rather than a plain rational statement, alike logical and self-evident."

"I may, indeed, be true to you in the lower acceptation of the term," she replied, mournfully, "though I begin to think there is no safeguard even for that, where only a nominal Christianity exists; but in the highest, grandest sense of the word I cannot be true to you, nor true to any earthly vow or tie, if I am untrue to Him to whom I owe my first allegiance."

"I cannot see why you may not continue as you have been; of course, I wish you to perform every duty with scrupulous exactitude; I strive to do so myself; I do not think any man living can bring against me, Philip Proctor, any one charge of injustice, meanness, or ingratitude. I am true and just in all my dealings; I defraud no man; I am kind to my inferiors; I am charitable to the extent of my means—say, is it not so? Is not my life as blameless as that of any of those men in Laurel-street yonder, who are members of the church, and authorities in all spiritual

matters? Tell me, dear, candidly and impartially, do I ever offend against the moral and social law?"

She was distressed beyond measure; she could not bear to vex him, to make him angry; and yet if indeed she would be a true wife in the highest acceptation of the term, now was the moment for the manifestation of her unwavering fidelity. Half tearfully she said—"Socially, I am sure you never offend, no, never; there is no better citizen anywhere than my husband. But morally, dearest—O! who can lay his hand on his heart, and say that, as regards the moral law, he is perfectly upright and pure from blame? For it is not only our words and our actions that are to be weighed in the balance, but our very thoughts, and whosoever offendeth in one point is guilty of all. It seems to me that the chain of our lives is like the chain we heard of the other day at Wigan—like it in many respects—that was in the main of good metal, well wrought and tempered; but one link, only one link, was faulty, and that one imperfection was the cause of a terrible calamity! And so if one link be wanting, or imperfect, in the whole chain of our moral being, it is worthless, and fit only to be condemned."

"You are too profound for me," returned Philip, coldly; "I cannot enter into such fine distinctions. I try to do my duty, and I know that is enough—can you think God requires more?"

"Yes, I am sure He does. He says, 'My son, give Me *thy heart*.' If I strove with all my might to do my duty towards you, obeying your slightest wish, treating you with all outward deference, and yet keep from you my heart, would you value my obedience, my reverence? Would you not say, 'All this docility, all this external respect, and pains-taking servitude, is nothing, seeing that my wife does not love me. She acts only from cold duty, perhaps from fear; but never is she prompted by that fervent impulse of a devoted affection, never constrained by that *loving* loyalty that a true wife ought to feel towards the husband in whom her every earthly desire and joy ought to be centred.' Would you not say this, Philip?"

"Of course I should, and much more too; but I do not see what your ingenious supposition has to do with me and my duty."

"O, Philip, you will not see! You will give to God all *but* your affections, and therefore the all is of no account."

"Edith, my dear, if we talk for seven years we shall never understand each other; henceforth let there be silence on this subject; let us agree to differ, since it must be so; but let us differ tacitly. If I am baited in this way I cannot answer for the consequences. I shall lose my temper, and say things I shall be very sorry to have said when the heat of altercation is over. You understand me; this subject is not to be renewed on any pretence whatever?"

"Yes," said Edith, meekly; "but you do not forbid my going to Mr. Stanton?"

"I have said that you are at liberty to act as you think proper," he replied, impatiently; "pray do not look so like a martyr: I should never dream of putting any restraint on your inclinations; so, once for all, there is my answer. Only do not expect from me any sympathy—any co-operation."

He spoke with so much heat that it was evident his threat of being seriously angry was fulfilled without loss of time.

And then Philip took up his book, and appeared absorbed in its contents: for an hour passed, and he spoke no word to Edith, who sat shading her face with her hand, and trying to keep back the rising tears that would fall over her *Sunday at Home;* and then, feeling that he had punished his offending wife quite sufficiently, he shut up the volume that had interested him so mightily, and began to talk volubly on indifferent subjects, and Edith tried to enter into the conversation; but in spite of all her endeavours, her voice would tremble, and her thoughts would wander, and her eyes would fill with tears when she met her husband's glance. Nothing provokes a man so thoroughly as crying, especially if he has been the actual source of the distress. So after a time the conversation flagged. Philip yawned, and pushed the coals about on the grate with the toe of his slipper, to its no small detriment; and Edith strove to find some meaning in the page

before her, but in vain; and she looked very pale and weary, and felt sick at heart. She was really glad when the baby's piping little cry was heard above, for it gave her a fair excuse for going away; and she sprang up, saying "baby wanted her;" and ran up-stairs so quickly that her breath was almost gone when she reached the landing. Then she tried to recover herself, gasping and leaning on the baluster for support; but the tears that had been so long repressed, or only suffered to drop at rare intervals, burst forth in an irrepressible gush. In vain she tried to keep down the choking sobs; they would come loud and fast; and her limbs trembled so much, that, if she had not clung to the rail with desperate energy, she would have fallen.

Matty heard something that made her feel rather uneasy, so laying down the babe whom she had meanwhile fed and lulled to sleep again, she came out to see what might be the matter. With her stout arm, she soon brought her mistress into the bed-room, and placed her in the arm-chair by the fire, and proceeded to the administration of water, sal-volatile, and smelling-salts, with an energy and composure quite remarkable in so young and inexperienced a servant. But the truth was, Edith's kind, wise, and practical training was beginning to mitigate Matty's wild awkwardness, and to teach her many nice, thrifty, womanly ways.

Yet, now, all her acquired skill was useless: Edith was no longer what she had been in constitution; she was restored to health, and there was little or nothing of the invalid yet lingering in her looks or her feelings; but the full vigour and strength of her girlhood was gone for ever. The restraint she had maintained during the whole evening, the strict control she had kept over her fast-rising emotion, made the moment of reaction so much the worse. She made one strenuous effort to struggle with the choking sensation in her throat, to hold back the loud passionate crying, that was absolutely battling for the mastery, and then the waves of hysterical agony burst forth wildly and irresistibly. Matty flew to fetch her master. Philip was already at the foot of the stairs; he had heard sounds that he could only interpret

in one way; and, muttering to himself that women were always going into hysterics when they were crossed, he hesitated as to the expediency of making his appearance on the scene of action. He had heard that such paroxysms frequently exhausted themselves when they were little heeded.

But when Matty almost leaped into his arms, lighted candle and all, from the third step of the stair, and imperatively summoned him to the rescue, he could not do less than respond to her appeal. But he went up rather leisurely; and Matty, who had wonderfully quick perceptions when culinary operations were not under consideration, immediately decided in her own mind that "master and missis had been having a tumble out. More shame to him for it; and she'd take care and never let a man get the upper hand of her, for bad was the best of them, and no mistake."

Philip's coolness, however, vanished when he saw how ill Edith really was, and he quite forgot the severe treatment he had been regarding as most judicious in a case of hysterics. He tried every remedy he could think of, from burnt feathers, which *ought* to scare any one into their sober senses who has delicate lungs and olfactory organs, to homœopathic globules. After all, a few whispered words, one passionate caress, were more efficacious than all besides, or else the fit had spent itself, for the sobbing ceased, and Edith, quite worn out and very tremulous, was able to regret the trouble she had given him, and humbly to beg Philip's pardon for having been so foolish.

And Philip, reflecting on his own harshness and want of temper, and on his wife's recent recovery from severe and protracted illness, felt himself quite a brute, so he would not hear a word of apology, and only urged her to make haste to bed and try to go to sleep, which sensible advice she very sensibly took, and in half-an-hour Philip was by her side trying to follow her example, but kept pertinaciously awake by his mingled penitence and vexation.

And so ended that miserable Sunday evening.

CHAPTER XIII.

SCHEMES AND COUNSELS.

On the Thursday after that eventful Sunday evening, Edith summoned up her courage and went to see her pastor. She and Philip knew Mr. Stanton very well, though there was not any decided intimacy between them; indeed, Mr. Proctor, enthusiastically as he admired the eloquence and fervour of his excellent minister, had no wish to see much of him in the familiar intercourse of social life. He felt instinctively that on the most momentous points there was little sympathy between them. So their intercourse was limited to a call or two on the part of Mr. Stanton, a friendly recognition when they met, and an invitation to tea from Mrs. Stanton, which Edith was unable to accept.

She felt now some trepidation as she sat alone, awaiting the coming of her pastor, for she was naturally shy and diffident; and it seemed quite terrible to be obliged to make herself the subject of conversation, and, above all, to have to explain to him the object of her visit. He did not keep her long in expectation; he had but that minute returned from one of his regular pastoral rounds, and only lingered to give his wife some information about a sick woman who stood greatly in need of something more than ministerial visitation.

The moment the door opened Edith's tremors ceased; that cordial grasp of the hand, that kind, cheery greeting, that pleasant, familiar face banished at once and entirely every nervous misgiving—she felt quite at ease, and equal to the conversation that lay before her.

"I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Proctor," said Mr. Stanton, as he drew up his coziest easy-chair for her especial benefit; "my wife and I were talking about you only this morning, and wondering whether we might ask you to help us next

week at our old women's tea party. Do you think Mr. Proctor could spare you to us for one afternoon?"

"I do not know, really," replied Edith, rather confused; "Mr. Proctor is very busy just now, and does not like me to be much from home; but I should like to come if—" she scarcely knew how to finish the sentence; she did not wish to convey to Mr. Stanton the idea that Philip would object to her being useful in the church and congregation, neither was it pleasant for him to think that she was herself unsocial and entirely engrossed by her own pleasures and duties. Besides, there was still the business on which she had come, to be introduced, and she felt she could not just then converse sensibly on any other subject. So in the first pause—and that soon occurred, for Mr. Stanton quickly perceived that his visitor was there on some special errand—Edith made known her wish, and soon found herself speaking quite freely to her pastor on many points that hitherto had been discussed only in her own mind. She could hardly believe that she had indeed so entirely lost all sense of painful restraint; it scarcely seemed to be herself who was pouring out thus frankly the doubts, and fears, and trembling hopes, which for many weeks had filled her whole soul, and occupied all her thoughts, while her lips were sealed to all around. But it was an immense relief and a great comfort to receive spiritual advice and consolation from her own beloved pastor; it was sweet to be admitted to the privileges of Christian communion, and to look forward to all the joys of fellowship with the people of God; and she was leaving Mr. Stanton's house with a heart full of thankfulness and calm content that her work was so far accomplished, when, after a little hesitation, he said—"I have been quite looking for this, Mrs. Proctor, for some time past; but I hoped—I really quite expected—Mr. Proctor would come with you. Is it not a pity that you do not make public profession of your faith together? It is well for husband and wife to be one in action, as well as in intent; and I hope Mr. Proctor will again consider the subject, and resolve to delay no longer."

Edith's cheek flushed crimson, as she replied that Philip

had not at present any intention of coming forward. Mr. Stanton's perceptions were quick, as indeed the perceptions of any minister of a large city congregation ought to be, and he understood at once how matters stood; so he made no rejoinder; only after a moment's thought adding inquiringly, "But of course he is aware of the purport of your visit to me, this day?"

"Certainly," replied Edith, in a tone which she vainly strove to render indifferent: she did not venture to say more; indeed, what could she say without referring to that which was now her greatest trial, a trial too which would certainly become the heavier if shared with any living creature? for Edith was not one of those shameless women who find an unnatural satisfaction in discussing their husband's shortcomings, evil propensities, and aggravating peculiarities of temper or conduct. She felt that by whomsoever a man might be condemned, and however worthily, no censure, no word of blame, either implied or expressed, ought to fall from lips that had sworn to him the eternal and complete fidelity, that a man has a right to claim from the woman he takes to his bosom, as his life companion. Edith would as soon have thought of proclaiming on the housetops all the tender little love-passages that had ever been between them, as of breathing to any living creature her convictions of her husband's failings or faults, or her sense of his trivial sins of omission and commission.

She walked home in the fading twilight, enjoying the unwonted mildness of the afternoon, and feeling altogether more at ease than she had done since her first resolutions on the subject of religion. If Philip had only sympathized with her she would have been quite happy; if he had joined in the public profession of faith, she would have been something more than happy. The bare idea of her husband sharing with her the sweetest and holiest privileges of the Christian Church was like a blissful, ecstatic vision. Alas! only a vision; for, as things were at present, Philip Proctor seemed very far from the kingdom of God. Only—God, who generally chooses to work upon men's hearts by force of cir-

cumstances, can, if it so pleases Him, constrain them to bend to His power, and to receive His grace, in spite of all circumstances. Never had Edith so fully appreciated the value, the unspeakable blessing, of intercessory prayer. If with her lips she might not persuade her husband, she might yet, by her consistent conduct, win him to admire the beauty of holiness, and finally to strive after that which his heart and conscience approved; and always and everywhere she could pray for him. She reached home just as the purple light on the Mersey began to deepen into more sombre shades; she hurried up-stairs and threw off her walking-things hastily, for it was already tea-time, and Philip must be wanting his tea, for they had dined early. When she reached the sitting-room, she glanced into the shop through the half-glass door, but saw only Robert knitting his brows over some complicated affair of an invoice; her husband was not there.

Never mind; he had only stepped out to speak to a neighbour, or to go to the post; he would be back before she could be ready for him, for, to her great dismay, she found the fire burning low, and the kettle scarcely beginning its pleasant song. Baby had been fractious, and, in attending to her little ladyship's requirements, Matty had altogether forgotten the lapse of time. However, the grate was soon replenished, and bade fair to burn up in—Matty said, "less than no time." For Edith was endowed with an absolute genius for fire-making; she could overcome the obstinacy of heavy lifeless lumps of coal; she could coax the most miserable little flicker into a ruddy flame; she could do anything and everything that human skill could do with fuel, good, bad, and indifferent. I believe the secret of her success lay in a little address in handling the poker, and in always clearing out the ashes from the corners of the grate; and then her hearth—that was always clean and shining.

Perhaps some young lady will laugh at this paragraph, and say that making a fire is not a very grand accomplishment after all. Perhaps not; but it is one that many people lack, and would do well to cultivate. Certainly it is a talent all

wives ought to possess, for where is the man, from the noble to the peasant, who likes to come in from the outer world and find his own hearth chilly, cheerless, and neglected? After all, it is *little things* that for the most part make the sum of our happiness or misery; much of the jarring of the domestic circle, much of the real discomfort that darkens so many homes, springs from trifles neglected, or from trifling things said or done, that a little wise reflection would have bade one leave unsaid and undone.

Mrs. Proctor soon saw that the fire was in a fair way to burn well and clearly; then she glanced round the room, and with one or two dextrous movements restored the order that had been impaired in her short absence, and then she proceeded to set the table for tea.

The fire had burned to perfection, the tea was infusing, the toast buttered, everything in readiness, and yet Philip did not appear. Edith, after waiting a few minutes in her usual seat, went into the shop, and asked Robert if he knew where his master had gone. He did not; Mr. Proctor had been absent for nearly two hours, but he had not said on what business he was engaged; he expected him back every minute.

"Look, and see if he is coming," said Edith, beginning to feel anxious.

The apprentice went out, and looked up and down Myrtle-place for nearly a minute; it was growing so dark, that his survey could not possibly extend very far, and he came back, saying he saw nothing of Mr. Proctor, and that it was indeed far too dark to discern one person from another at a distance of several yards; and forthwith he returned to his puzzling calculations, and Edith to the sitting-room, which looked excessively alluring and comfortable after that brief glimpse of the chilly gloom without.

Where could Philip be? It was quite provoking to see the nice toast drying up before the fire, and the fire itself losing its brilliant glow; she took out her work and tried to occupy herself, but though her fingers moved nimbly along the hem, her thoughts were still wandering hither and thither in

search of the truant, and her anxiety began to grow painful, for never before since her marriage had her husband absented himself at meal-times, without giving her due notice, "and at tea-time, too!" said Edith to herself, "when he is always so ready for his tea, and quite vexed if it happens to be a quarter of an hour later than usual. Where can he be? O! I trust nothing has occurred!"

It was past six o'clock now, and she desired Matty to carry out the toast for her own tea, adding that she would make fresh when Mr. Proctor came in, and in the meantime she would undress baby, and get her off to sleep.

To which Matty replied, "she did hope the master had not gone and got killed; if he were crossing the river he might be drowned, and nobody know who he was."

A supposition that made Edith both frightened and angry, and she hastily dismissed her maid, and proceeded to the evening toilet of her little Mary. But baby was robed in her little white nightgown, and tucked up in her pretty nest, and even hushed to sleep, and still no Philip; and Edith began to feel the suspense intolerable, and would have put on her bonnet, and set out to seek her husband, if she had had the slightest idea of the direction which she ought to take; for whether he had gone north, south, east, or west, she could not tell.

Once more she tidied the room, and poked the fire, and swept the hearth; and again she arranged the table, that she had set so hastily more than two hours before, and afresh made every preparation for her husband's return. It was considerably past seven, when she heard voices in the shop that made her start up to reconnoitre, voices she knew very well—those of Edwin Haughton and Estelle Drummond! O! what had happened? What had they come to tell her?

But a moment's glance re-assured her; Philip was there himself, looking excited and eager, and listening with deep attention to something addressed to him, in a low, impressive tone, by Miss Drummond. Then, there was an invitation to go into the parlour, and take a cup of tea with Mrs.

Proctor; but both Edwin and Estelle excused themselves, and bidding good-bye, went their way, as if in haste; and Philip just staid to make several inquiries of his apprentice, and then came into the sitting-room, where Edith was impatiently awaiting him.

"O! Philip, dear," was her greeting, "why did you not leave word where you were going? I have been so frightened about you."

"Well, my dear," was his answer, "I pretty well divined where you were going, and as I had business in the town, I went about it, and did not hurry myself, for I thought you would find Mr. Stanton's conversation so interesting that you would prefer staying with him and Mrs. Stanton for the evening."

"I should not think of staying out to tea without letting you know, dear; I came in directly after five, quite anxious lest I should keep you waiting."

"And I have kept you waiting! I am very sorry, Edie, but indeed I could not help it; you cannot guess what I have been about—something very important, you may be sure."

"No, I cannot guess at all; I did not know that you had any special business in the town just at present. What have you been doing? Have you had any tea?"

"No, indeed! I am both hungry and thirsty—come! pour out at once, and I will tell you the news while we are drinking our tea. Prepare to be surprised, Mrs. Proctor."

"I am quite prepared for anything—do make haste and tell me; only think what I am suffering from curiosity."

"Well, to begin at the beginning: Edwin told me on Christmas Day of a house to be let, and a bookseller's business to be disposed of in Castle-street, and he strongly urged my taking to it, and offered to go with me and look after the matter. We went on the last day of the old year, and everything I saw made me feel certain of success, could I only manage the pecuniary part of the affair. It is a first-rate thing, Edie; a handsome shop well fitted up, most convenient offices, and a very nice roomy house, three times better than this one;" and Philip glanced rather contemptuously round

the snug little parlour where he had spent so many happy evenings.

"Leave Myrtle-place? leave this dear house, my first own real home? O, Philip, dear, it cannot be true; you do not mean it?"

"I do, indeed. Really, my love, you are too romantic; I thought you had been a more practical little woman. It would never do to stay here to one's own disadvantage, just because we had some pleasant associations with the house."

"But the business here is improving so very much; you told me only last week you were as busy as you could be, and I can see for myself how different things are from what they once were. Had we not better let well alone, as people say?"

"You talk like a woman, my dear. Yes, I am glad to say the business is thriving wonderfully; I never thought it would turn out so well, for at first we really had nothing to do; but for all that it is only a poor peddling little bit of a business, and can never yield any very satisfactory results. I might stay here for half-a-century and never realize a fortune. And now, dear, that we are parents, it behoves us to look carefully to the future. I should like our little maid to have the best of educations, and I should not like her to have to battle with the world, as you had, my poor darling, before I found you and wanted you for my own. You agree with me, Edie, dear?"

"Yes, dear, so far as baby is concerned. If it please God to spare her life, I shall strain every nerve to give her a better education than I have had myself; every mother must wish that for her child. And I do hope it will never be necessary for her to go out into the world to get her own living. The governess-life has some pleasant phases, I allow; but, generally speaking, it is a weary, lonely, loveless lot for a young girl. Of course, for our child's sake, I should wish to get on. There can be no harm in striving lawfully to better one's condition; but it seems to me, dearest, that we are progressing here very satisfactorily, and it would be a great risk to incur larger liabilities, without the certainty of larger returns."

"You do not understand it, Edie. In order to achieve great things, one *must* risk something; I repeat it, we can never have an extensive business while we stay in this place. A mere suburban business, it is really little more; indeed, it is not so much if you look at it carefully: as Estelle said this afternoon, our shop is neither in the town nor out of it."

Edith started as if she had been stung. "What has Estelle to do with it?" she said, hastily.

"Nothing, of course; only when we were talking it over this afternoon, she came in quite by chance; she joined Edwin somewhere in Lord-street; she could scarcely avoid giving her opinion; and really, Edie, though I do not admire her ways with the Haughtons, I must say she is wonderfully sensible. She ought to have been a man; she sees things so clearly and so thoroughly; her views are not one-sided, like those of women in general, and she has nerve enough for anything, and perhaps a trifle too much ambition, considering her sex."

"If she really is sensible so much the worse, for I am convinced that her influence is prejudicial to Isabel's happiness. I wish she would go away; I know Edwin and his wife would get on a great deal better if she were not there to interfere in her bland, sham-innocent fashion. Well, what did she advise?"

"That no time should be lost; for there are other persons willing enough to step into such a first-rate position. If I refuse I may never have the chance again. Estelle's advice was sound, I assure you, and very kind; her chief thought was for you and the baby: she thinks you deserve a better house, better prospects, a better standing in society; and her clear, good sense and feminine tact led her to perceive that nothing can be really and permanently improved while we remain here. All her solicitude was for you, my dear; she spoke of you most kindly, and said that your being Isabel's friend at once awakened her interest in you."

"I cannot thank her; I wish she would not interest herself about me; I distrust her. O, Philip, dear, let us have nothing to do with her."

"Do you call that quite Christian-like, Edie? What will Mr. Stanton say to you? Does he allow his church members to be as uncharitable as they like?"

"I hope I am not uncharitable: I would not say this to any one else; much as I distrust her, I would not discuss her character save with you; and I would do her any good if I could; only I do not want her to be mixed up with our concerns. But, putting her aside, have you money enough to enter upon so expensive a concern?"

"You little innocent, no! But Edwin will lend me what I want."

"I thought you said he wanted money himself?"

"He has plenty now. Perhaps I was mistaken before; I dare say wealthy men are often temporarily inconvenienced; any way, he offered himself to furnish all that I lacked. Of course I shall pay proper interest."

"Ah, I wish we could have staid here, and *saved* a little; we might, now the business has improved so much. I don't like speculating with borrowed capital. When must you decide, dear?"

Philip turned very red, and answered, "I have decided, my pet; I thought you would not trouble your little head about dry, puzzling business matters: it is all settled. I have signed the papers."

"And you have taken counsel with Estelle Drummond, and concealed it all from your own wife!" was Edith's unuttered reproach. She was cut to the heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

APPROACHING CHANGES.

Yes! it was quite true, they were to leave Myrtle-place almost immediately; and there was small time for regrets, for there was much to be done, and little leisure wherein to do it. Edith found herself at once in a whirl of business, and, involved in a thousand petty cares, could scarcely command five minutes in the day wherein to sit down and muse calmly on the changes that were awaiting her. The very next afternoon Philip would have her go down with him to inspect the house in Castle-street, and certainly she was obliged to admit that the shop and warehouses were all that could be wished, and the situation, as regarded business prospects, most admirable. The house too was, as Philip had told her, both handsome and convenient, but it would require much more furniture than they already possessed, and it was very certain that Matty could never do all the work, even with her own assistance, which was now rather limited and uncertain, since her delicate baby occupied by far the greater portion of her time.

Then the situation, though excellent for business, was not, she feared, quite so good for health; Myrtle-place stood so high, and was so airy and so open to the sea breezes, and baby could so soon be carried into the pleasant outskirts, if not into the veritable country itself. Where could she possibly be taken for fresh air when they came to live in Castle-street? Philip urged the proximity of the river, but Edith did not think that very much mended the matter; true, she could send baby across the water at the small charge of twopence, but then the idea of trusting Matty, or any young girl, to carry such precious freight in and out of steamers, was not to be thought of!

However, it was of no use now to repine; there was nothing to be done except to make the best of it. Edith, thus early in her married life, happily divined what some women never can or never will comprehend—that nothing more thoroughly exasperates a man, and makes him snappish and morose, than a logical or illogical and elaborate setting forth of his own rashness, and his own erroneous conclusions, when the deed in which they have been exemplified is irrevocably completed. When the transaction is past recall, it is of no earthly use to be everlastingly deploring the want of judgment which dictated and carried it out; and Edith felt instinctively that to find fault with what her husband had done, now that the whole affair was decided, would only vex and irritate him, even though she should have reason on her own side.

And to vex Philip was now more than ever what she most earnestly deprecated. She could not convince him of that which she would have given worlds to bring to his conviction; entreaty was useless, it was the one theme on which there was a total absence of sympathy, almost an alienation; and all she could hope to do was to *win* him to better things by showing him, silently, how far her religion influenced her conduct in the trivialities of every-day life, as well as in the more important matters of their mutual lot.

So she only said, she hoped it would answer, and she must do her best to manage things as economically as possible, and to keep the increased household expenditure within prudent limits. And she did not say this in a lugubrious tone, which implied that her "hope" was of the very faintest and dullest description; neither did she refer to her own careful management as though she were preparing for petty martyrdom; but she spoke cheerfully and smiled brightly, linking her arm in Philip's as she said the words; and he, charmed with her sweetness and patience—for he knew he had tried both, he knew he had not been quite wise, or quite fair towards his good, sensible little Edie—suddenly turned round, and there, in the empty desolate warehouse, gave her a warm kiss

and a hearty embrace that told how much he appreciated her goodness and forbearance.

"Thank you, dearest," he said, in his most cordial tones—he had not spoken quite so heartily since the Sunday evening before—"thank you twenty times; not one woman in a thousand would have behaved so well, so prettily! for I ought—indeed I ought to have deferred signing the contract till I had taken your advice, my love. I believe that Estelle is a witch: it was she more than Edwin who urged me to complete the bargain without delay; and she said in her coaxing way, that seems so innocent, and yet so sensible, 'Now, do not go and teaze your dear wife about it; she is not at all strong yet, and she is so anxious about the baby; I am sure she would rather not be troubled to discuss the question. Besides, what do women know about business? They are happiest when everything but their dress and their household appointments is arranged for them.' And I listened to her, Edie, and Edwin agreed with her, and so the deed was done; but I assure you I felt no slight misgivings when I came out of Headley's office, where I did the signing; and I felt half afraid of what you might say: I thought perhaps you would be quite put out; I am sure you had reason, my dear."

"I was put out at first, Philip; I felt, and I do still feel, so very sorry to leave Myrtle-place; but when I knew the thing was done, and could not be undone, I thought it was worse than useless to throw cold water."

"I wish every woman was half as sensible. Some of them, when they disapprove of their husbands' proceedings, are just like wet blankets. There's young Jeffrey's wife—how I pity the poor fellow!—she falls on all his projects like a soaking feather-bed. As he can't divorce her on the ground of incompatibility of temperament, I should think there is nothing before him, but a choice between early death or a lunatic asylum."

"Not quite so bad, I hope; but seriously, Philip, I hope you will never startle me so much again. When I heard that we really must leave Myrtle-place, and come to live here,

I could scarcely breathe; for a minute or so I felt absolutely stunned."

"I never will, I promise you, Edie: it was very wrong of me to take you by surprise. I assure you, when I left home yesterday afternoon, I had no idea of returning with the news that I had absolutely taken to these premises. Really it was that Estelle who bewitched me. I wonder, Edie, if she bewitches Edwin after the same fashion; it cannot be very comfortable for Isabel. Somehow I felt impelled to do as she counselled; and then those dark blue eyes of hers, they seem to look one through and through; it makes one think of the tales one hears and reads about magnetism."

"I wish, indeed, Estelle would go away. I cannot say, even to you, that she makes mischief between Isabel and her husband, and yet I think she does; she always seems to be saying something or other that tends either directly or indirectly to lower Isabel in Mr. Haughton's estimation. Her very flatteries are veiled criticisms; her very kindnesses are meant to wound—at least, I cannot help thinking so. I will give you an instance of her style:—Just before Isabel was confined, the very last time she went into town, she bought a pair of earrings for Estelle. She said Estelle had really shown her many kindnesses, and expressed an intense anxiety for her safety in the coming trial, and she thought, perhaps after all she had done her an injustice, and she would like to make her some little present—it might be her last opportunity—as a token of goodwill; and so she chose what she knew her cousin wished for, a certain pair of dead gold earrings, set with emeralds, and the next day she presented them."

"Well, and was Miss Drummond ungrateful? I heard her talking the other day about the pomps and vanities of the world, as if she were about to commence her novitiate in a convent of the severest order?"

"On the contrary, she seemed overpowered with gratitude; she kissed Isabel again and again; admired the ear-rings; they were the very things she coveted, so good, so chaste, so elegant; and so kind of her cousin to think of her; she should never wear them without a thousand affectionate remem-

brances. All this sounded very well, and Isabel said she looked so pretty, and so pleased, and there was such an innocent expression in her beautiful eyes that she wondered how she could ever have mistrusted her, and she feared she was herself growing cross and suspicious, and everything else that is hateful in woman. But that same evening, after she had left the little drawing-room for her own chamber, she came down again for some books she had forgotten: the lamps were out, but the folding-doors were partly open, admitting light enough for her purpose from the chandelier in the large drawing-room. Right under the gas-lights at the centre table stood Edwin and Estelle, the latter showing her present. Edwin held them up, examined them, and pronounced them very handsome; and presently Estelle said, in those, low, sweet, winning tones of hers, that *seem* the very soul of ingenuousness and amiability, 'Is it not kind of dearest Isabel to think of me, and at this time too, when she might well be occupied with far other things? But I hope, Edwin, she was not taken in; I hope she has not paid more for these baubles than they are worth. You know she is so good herself, she believes everything that people say to her; all the tradesmen—wretched creatures—think they are licensed to cheat poor dear Isabel; and I should be so sorry if she were imposed upon through her goodness to me; for after all, between ourselves, I do not care about such things. I should not mind if I were sentenced never to wear another ornament as long as I live; indeed, I am not sure whether jewels *are* ornaments; it is rather a barbaric taste to load one's self with gold and precious stones. I prefer simplicity."

"That was not friendly in her, for she knows Edwin is rather annoyed at Isabel's propensity to let herself be cheated. Of course, no man likes to think his wife incapable of holding her own against the ordinary wiles of petty chicanery. Really Isabel does spend her money a little indiscreetly, there is no doubt about it; but that is only her own affair, for she brought Edwin so good a fortune that I do not see how he can fairly take her to task for it. As for Estelle reminding him of his wife's failing by such inuendos, it is

altogether contemptible; and then her concluding oration against wearing ornaments was quite out of place; it was all uttered with *malice prepense*, in order to make Edwin think his wife a mere doll-beauty, fond of jewels and fine clothes, and herself a sensible modest young woman, free from paltry vanity, and altogether above the petty pleasures of the toilet. You are quite right, Edie; Estelle Drummond is a dangerous character, we will keep her at arm's length. It is a thousand pities that Edwin is her guardian, and I believe her trustee also. It affords so excellent a reason for her remaining at Redcliffe House."

"And now, dear, we have said enough about Estelle; tell me, when are we to move here?"

"As soon as can be managed, Edie. The fixtures and the stock are to be taken at a valuation. Then there will be some papering and painting to be done, and there are one or two alterations to be made in the shop that must be attended to before we open; and you will have your part to do, for the rooms up-stairs look desolate enough. It will need all your wonderful skill and taste to make them as cozy and pretty as those in Myrtle-place."

"Indeed I think so; and I am afraid we shall never make our present furniture do. However, I will try to make the best of it. There are some sales advertised for next week and the week after. I must see if I can pick up any bargains; and I caught up a useful hint from Mrs. Frankland the other day: she had made such nice ottomans, or rather settees, out of common packing-cases."

"Common packing-cases, dear! how could she manage that?"

"She covered them first of all with old newspaper, and then lined the inside with coloured calico, and the outsides were covered with chintz or cheap damask, with a sort of stuffed cushion on the lid. I could manage them very well; it only wants a little management and taste."

"Both of which you largely possess, my dear! and an admirable dower they are for any woman. I was quite right when I said it was better to marry a fortune in a wife, than with her."

"And another thing, Philip; I wish you would get rid of Robert as soon as he is out of his time. I am sure he is not to be depended on; I am afraid he is both cunning and spiteful?"

"Nonsense, darling! he is surly and bearish, and he has the most waspish temper I ever encountered; but I think he understands his business. He works very well when his sweet disposition will allow him; and, though he may be resentful, I do not believe he bears malice."

"Do you remember the spoilt goods I found hidden away under the waste-paper?"

"Indeed I do; I have often thought of them with an uneasy mind. Of course he told a lie about the matter, for he and he alone could have placed them where they were, and that was both unprincipled and cowardly. But it is now nearly a year since the event occurred, and in the meantime I have kept strict watch, and nothing of the same nature has transpired; still I will think of what you say; but Robert's apprenticeship will not terminate for nearly eighteen months to come.

They lingered till it was too dark to make any further examination of the premises, and then they walked home arm in arm to "the dear old house," as Edith began to call it; and as she reached the top of the hill and looked back for her favourite glance of the Mersey, and saw the purple shadows losing themselves in the obscurity of the deepening nightfall, she could scarcely believe that it was indeed only twenty-four hours since she had paused on the same spot on her return from Mr. Stanton's.

From that day Edith's occupations thickened around her. Any one who has really practised economy knows it can only be done effectually at an infinite expense of time and pains. In order to be comfortable, and to live respectably in this world, there must either be considerable expenditure of money, or of time and trouble; it is because people will not avail themselves of the latter alternative that there is so much misery in our social circles. And poor little Mary did not thrive any better as the year grew older; she pined, and

fretted, and would not sleep by day or by night; till Edith began to grow pale and thin, and look, as Philip said, "quite the shadow of herself." And yet her heart clung with ever-increasing tenderness to the frail, tiny blossom, in her loving but weary arms. She would not have changed her little delicate child for the bonniest and fairest baby in Christendom; indeed, she often said to herself, that if God should give her other children in the years yet to come, blooming, healthy, sturdy boys and girls, they could never be to her what this poor wee morsel of infancy was—this first darling, this new treasure, that seemed always preparing to slip away from her fond maternal clasp, to go back, as nurse said, to the God who had given her for a time to earthly parents.

So that Edith found it very hard work to nurse by night and by day, and to fill up every spare moment in preparations for the approaching flitting: if it had not been for Miss Wilson she must have broken down more than once; but the kind-hearted spinster gave her young friend the benefit of something more than her advice—a commodity, by the way, which no one ever seems to grudge to anybody; she came day after day and helped Edith in the work that was accumulating around her. It was Miss Wilson who hemmed the new, and altered the old blinds to suit the house in Castle-street; and Philip was perfectly astonished when he saw the result of their joint labours in upholstery. In the morning he beheld a plain and rather rough packing-box standing in the middle of the sitting-room floor; at tea-time he looked again; and lo! a handsome-looking long ottoman, equally useful and ornamental. His admiration for his wife's ingenuity knew no bounds; and when he saw how she cut and contrived the carpets, and turned, and cleaned, and mended all sorts of things, he again congratulated himself on the fortune he had acquired *in* his wife—a fortune which, as he remarked to Miss Wilson, could not well be squandered or lost by speculation.

And Philip himself worked hard—so hard that he was seldom out of the shop till between nine and ten, or even later

at night, and he never lingered now over his meals. Sunday was really his only leisure time.

And so the days passed on till the evening came when Edith was to be received into the visible Church of Christ. Since that one allusion about her visit to Mr. Stanton the subject had never once been named between them; and had Edith been less busy she would have suffered acutely from a sense of isolation and a want of sympathy when most of all it would have been valued. As it was she had scant time to give to regret, but when the afternoon arrived she was depressed and nervous; she could not bear the idea of going to chapel that evening without one word from Philip. He had so thoroughly kept his word about referring to religious topics, that Edith was even uncertain whether he knew that it was the evening of the church-meeting; or whether, knowing it, he remembered how deeply she was interested in that particular gathering of the members in Laurel-street. Nothing was said during tea; but as Matty was carrying out the tray she asked her mistress whether she would have her goloshes or her thick boots. Philip looked up from his memorandum-book, and said, "Are you going out, Edie? It is not a nice night."

"I am going to chapel, dear," she said, with tolerable composure.

"What for? Wednesday is service-night, is it not?"

"Yes, the regular service-night, but this is the church-meeting; it is always on Friday night."

"O!" was all Philip's rejoinder: he instantly comprehended what was to take place at that church-meeting, and his brow clouded over as he rose from his chair, and went away without a single word.

Edith felt very sad as she put on her cloak and bonnet; and as she took her solitary way through the lamp-lit streets to the sanctuary she was beginning to regard as her spiritual home. But during the prayer of commendation and the singing of the hymn she forgot all else but the joy of being united to Christ, not only in outward profession, but in secret and inalienable bonds; she felt that all the trial under which she mourned was but a part of the discipline that was to train her

spirit for purer and higher communion than any which she could now imagine. And when she went home and found Philip grave and moody she comforted herself by recalling the verses of the hymn sung by the Church when she, and several other candidates for membership, came into the lecture-room where the meeting was held :—

"In weal or woe, in joy or care,
Thy portion shall be ours;
Christians their mutual burdens bear,
They lend their mutual powers.

Come with us, we will do you good,
As God to us hath done:
Stand but in Him as those have stood
Whose faith the victory won.

And when by turns we pass away,
As star by star grows dim,
May each, translated into day,
Be lost and found in Him!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE LOTTERY OF MARRIAGE.

The afternoon sun was pouring his sultry rays on the pavement of Castle-street: it was the beginning of July, and the heat was almost unbearable; languidly the foot-passagers pursued their weary way; even the most earnest men of business seemed willing for once to let time get the start of them; and when the hour struck, the omnibuses defiling from Dale-street came slowly along, as if the tired gasping horses were only doing their work upon sternest compulsion, and under protest of moving at any rate beyond five miles an hour. The sky was cloudless, the air perfectly breezeless; all day long that dazzling, burning sun had shone down broadly, pitilessly, on the baked, dusty roads, on the smoky

house-tops, and on the river, where the ships lay at anchor, with their pennons hanging listlessly over the scorching decks, while the tide came in as quietly and unobtrusively as if it intended to take the good port of Liverpool by surprise. The ferry-boats carried not their usual complement of passengers, for it was too hot even for holiday-keeping; and those who were on the Cheshire shore thought they might as well stay and bake where they were, while the Liverpoolians thought they would not mend matters by toiling along the straight dull roads round about Birkenhead, or Rock Ferry.

But of all the hot places on that hot July afternoon Castle-street seems the hottest. In the drawing-room over the shop sits Edith busy with her sewing; the baby lies sprawling on the hearth-rug; a fine little girl, not quite two years old, is contemplating an admirable juvenile album, which cannot easily be spoiled, for it is made of pictures cut out of old papers and books, and pasted on bright-coloured glazed calico, all neatly overcast at the edges, and bound in good strong covers. Near to this little chubby thing sits, or rather lies, another child; she is gathered up in a heap in the corner of the sofa; her face is very thin, and it wears the deadly pallor of constitutional disease; her fingers are painfully white and slender, and her whole aspect is one which touches the heart of every beholder, for it is very clear that the young sufferer is the victim of some prolonged and wasting malady. And yet the childish face is very sweet; the pinched features give it an appearance of preternatural maturity; but the eyes are large, dark, and lustrous, and there is in their soft depths something mournfully pensive, and strangely full of soul.

It is nearly four years and a half since we last saw Edith Proctor: she too is changed; all the bright colouring of her once blooming countenance has passed away, and with the white and rosy tints, some people say, her prettiness has entirely vanished. That is not quite true, though a passing glance would never rest now on the face that was once so flower-like in its girlish beauty. But it is a calm, sweet, noble face; the brown eyes are softer than ever, and the long bright curls still flow in unwonted grace and profusion, while on the

broad smooth brow there is a revelation of deeper thought, and calmer trust, than in the days of yore. The whole countenance is replete with a grave, matronly sweetness that well suits the mother of the little fragile, invalid Mary. Many a care, many a sorrow, many an hour of watchfulness, and of hope deferred, and of disappointment meekly borne, has that serene, patient face known, since we saw it looking for the first time on scenes that are now no longer new and strange. The rooms of that Castle-street home, the look of the houses over the way, the side view of the towering dome of the Exchange, are all familiar now to Edith Proctor as the faces of her husband and her children. The memory of those Myrtle-place days is very fair and precious, but it is more like a lovely dream than aught that really once existed; they seem so far away, so long ago, so bright, so beauteous, wearing the rainbow-like hues of the misty, fading past.

Little Mary justified all her mother's most anxious apprehensions. As the months rolled away, her baby face grew strangely grave and contemplative; but the baby form waxed no stronger, and the hue of health never dawned on the wan, shrunken features, that seemed to belong rather to suffering middle age than to infancy, with its scarce awakened perceptions. It was soon ascertained that there was a strong tendency to spinal disease, combined with want of nervous and muscular power; and though good, kind Dr. Delany tried to look hopefully when he talked to Edith, and spoke cheerfully of what time *might* do, he told Philip in confidence that the spine would never acquire a healthy tone and vigour, and that entire paralysis of the left side was greatly to be apprehended. Many of their friends told each other that it would be a great mercy if God would take the helpless, sickly child to Himself, and they thought it was really wrong of Mrs. Proctor to be so wrapped up in it; one would imagine that she cared more about that one poor, stunted, frail blossom, than for the other two bonnie buds, that grew and prospered under the fostering shade of the parent tree.

In this supposition they were not far wrong. Edith clung, mother-like, most fondly to the child that was feeblest and

saddest. Little Mary, as she grew older, scarcely increased in stature, and her little steps were never heard pattering on stair or in lobby, neither was there any merry child-laughter in the house of the Proctors, till another baby came—the chubby, robust Susy, who sucked her fat little fists, and prospered from the hour of her birth, as did her baby-brother, who deposed her from the throne of babydom, when she was only a year and a-half old. Edith could not bear to hear people say it would be better for that tiny, fragile life to die out at once, rather than to linger on through long years of weariness, and feebleness, and pain; but it was absolute torture when Philip told her that people were right, and that it would be better for them, and better for the child, if she were early taken from a heritage of peculiar trial; that if she lived, she would be a burden to herself, and to all around her.

It might be so, and it was no wonder that indifferent people thought of little Mary's future in such a light; but that truths so hard and so bitter should be uttered by Philip, the child's own father, was very nearly unbearable. Edith believed he did not at all care for his eldest daughter: and she dated the era of his indifference from the time of their leaving Myrtle-place; for certainly he had once been very anxious about the little girl, and it gave his wife infinite comfort to assure herself of it. But the Philip of to-day was not the Philip of four years ago; he was not unkind, as the world translates the word; he was not often inconsiderate; but he had become a hard man of business. It had been terrible up-hill work to make his way against the pressure of liabilities so large and so burdensome: he had fought the fight courageously, and right bravely he had breasted the tide of difficulties which long threatened to overwhelm him; he had risen early and watched late; he had never spared himself, never yielded to the sometimes irrepressible craving for rest and for change of scene: all his strength, all his energy, all his intellect—and he was endowed with each and all in no contemptible degree—were bent to one great end—the perfect success of his business. The desire to be rich, to hold a position in the world, which he often evinced in earlier days, had now be-

come a master passion: business was his God, and he was its slave rather than its servant.

For three years the struggle between success and failure had been terrible and unceasing; it was a daily question of sinking or swimming; and nothing but efforts almost superhuman and self-denial, or rather self-devotion, almost unprecedented, could have borne him on safe, though worn, and scarred, and tempest-driven, to the present era. Many a time had he been on the verge of bankruptcy; many a night had he lain down on his restless pillow scarcely knowing whether the morrow might not bring, in all their miserable reality, the direful calamities he had so long deprecated, so long struggled against, with all his will and all his forces. The gulf that had opened between him and his gentle wife in those days when she first confessed to him her own determination to live the life of a professed Christian had widened and deepened; and that one reserve which she had wept over, and prayed over, and striven to overcome, seemed now to her to have become the parent of other reserves. She was no longer the confidante of all her husband's anxieties: from the date of their being established in Castle-street a change had slowly and almost imperceptibly developed itself; gradually he had ceased telling her the state of his business; when he took stock, which was very often, or when he went over his books, he never, as he once did, explained to her the result of his calculations; he became taciturn, and was apparently absorbed in abstract speculations, or in wearying, perplexing thought. Their circle of acquaintances was small, for Edith did not care for much society, and Philip said they could not afford the extra expense which receiving or going into company would be sure to involve. Nevertheless, Mrs. Proctor would have liked to cultivate the friendship of several ladies whom she met Sunday after Sunday, and week after week, in the chapel or lecture-room in Laurel-street; and, above all, she wished to see more of Mrs. Stanton, who had often evinced a desire to be on more intimate terms with them. But Philip discouraged everything of the kind; he avoided Mr. Stanton—whom, however, he admired more and more—because he feared the faithful

admonitions of his pastor. He still went regularly to the Sabbath morning service, but it was a very rare occurrence to see him in his pew in the evening; he steadily though politely declined entering into any conversation with the members of the church that might lead to an appeal, or even a hint, on the subject of personal religion, and he gently but firmly forbade Edith to mix herself up with any of the numerous religious and benevolent associations carried on by the Laurel-street church and congregation.

And Laurel-street was changed too, during the four years which had elapsed since Edith became a church member. The congregation had outgrown the sanctuary, and galleries had been erected; and now there was a talk about adding a wing to the building, which would then afford accommodation to two thousand persons. Mr. Stanton had become one of the most popular preachers of the day, and a leader of the denomination to which he belonged. And, as of old, Mr. Proctor held up his head when Mr. Stanton's name was mentioned, and he took care to inform people who were not cognizant of the fact, that he was a regular attendant on his ministry; and woe to the sectarian Churchman or Methodist who should venture to speak slightingly of Mr. Stanton's powers or doctrine; verily he would not fail to receive a Rowland for an Oliver.

But to revert to Castle-street on this particular broiling afternoon in July, 185—. Edith sewed on diligently till the clock struck five, and then she rang the bell for tea, and Matty, now grown into a comely, respectable-looking servant maid, appeared with the tray, and began setting the table for the evening meal.

"Please, ma'am, will master be in to tea?" asked Matty, as she arranged the cups and saucers.

"Yes, I expect him," replied Edith; "indeed I dare say he is already in the house. Make haste with the kettle; he will be sure to want his tea after his tiring walk to Everton; and tell Jane to come down for the children."

"May I stay, mamma?" said a little voice from the corner of the sofa; it was a sweet little voice, but very tremulous

and weak; and Mary tried to drag herself up into something like an upright posture, but failed in her endeavours.

Edith flew to her: "What is it, darling? what does my little daughter want?"

"I should like to sit up a little, mamma; I am so tired: and I should like to have my tea with you; it is so quiet here."

"Yes, you shall stay," returned Edith, lifting up the tiny form with the utmost tenderness and care, and propping it up with cushions; "but you must not talk when papa comes in—he will be tired this warm afternoon, and he will have many things to think about, and must not be disturbed."

"Indeed, mamma, I will not talk a bit—I will be so good if I may stay—but, mamma, what does papa think about so much?"

"Many things that my little Mary cannot understand now. Papa has a great deal to fill his mind that even I know little about; he has to work hard to get money for all of us. We all cost a good deal, and there is only papa to pay for everything."

"We could not do without papa," said the child.

"No, indeed," replied her mother, kissing her tenderly. "We all love dear papa, do we not?"

Edith's love for her husband had in nowise diminished; all his gravity and reserve, all his coldness, had failed to dim the lustre of her strong, fervent affection; he was still to her the most precious thing on earth—dearer, far dearer than in those halcyon days when she began her little housekeeping cares in Myrtle-place. Sometimes her heart was very sad within her, for she could not help doubting whether that Moloch, his business, had not usurped the place that used to be hers in his affections, and she sighed as she thought of past confidences and present reserves; and she yearned often for the old tenderness that had come to her desolate girlhood, like a lovely star to a rayless night.

She tried to be patient and wait, trusting that, in days yet to come, her prayers for her husband would be answered—hoping, though sometimes very tremblingly and faintly,

that there would yet be a time when, united in every thought and feeling, she and Philip would walk hand in hand along the heavenly road, strengthening and comforting each other through all the tribulations of the way, till at last, when it should please God to call them from earth, they would appear before Him, saying, Lo, here we are, and the children whom Thou hast given us!" And this faith, though too often only "little faith," upheld her through many a day of gloom, many a season of disappointment and despondency.

Meanwhile, Edith busied herself in putting away some toys with which the children had been playing, and in setting in order some of the furniture that romping little Susy had disarranged; and the never-failing duster came into requisition; for the open windows, and the atmosphere of the town was by no means favourable to cleanliness; and Edith always kept her own private duster in a snug little corner, where it was available at any moment. She had scarcely finished her "siding," as setting to rights is frequently called in Liverpool, when she heard the well-known step of her husband on the stairs, and she hastily smoothed little Mary's disordered ringlets, and told her once more she must be very quiet, and not teaze papa, if she staid in the drawing-room; and there being no time to make verbal promises, she kissed her mamma's hand, in earnest of the goodness she intended to practise.

Another moment, and the door opened, and Philip entered. He looked much older than when we saw him last; his countenance wore a gravity that almost amounted to sternness, and there rested on his brow a weight of care that evidently engrossed his mind, and depressed his spirits. He came in, looking thoroughly fagged with his broiling dusty walk, and not a little out of humour. He flung himself down on the sofa, and Edith hastened to place little Mary out of his way, in an easy chair, on the other side of the room, saying, at the same time, in her gentlest and most soothing tones, "You are dreadfully tired, I am sure, dear Philip!" His answer was a short and almost surly "Yes." His tone was full of annoyance.

Presently he said, with the same irritable inflexion in his

voice, "I have had my walk for nothing! that stupid old simpleton never knows his own mind twice together; after all he has sent the pamphlet to a London house! He talks largely of the prejudice against provincial publishers, and the advantages to be derived from employing a town house; some one has evidently been talking to him, for the suggestions were not his own, I am very certain; it is horribly provoking. Come! how late you are with tea! do bestir yourself; send that child away, and let us be quiet."

"She will be quite quiet, if she may stay," replied Edith; "she does not want to go into the nursery, and I promised her—"

"It seems to me," impatiently interrupted Philip, "that she never wants to do anything that I wish her to do. She is getting extremely troublesome, and the child herself will not be any the happier for being spoiled. Everybody hates spoiled children. *I do*, with all my heart."

Edith had the good sense not to defend herself against this very unfounded charge. She took the child in her arms, and her own lips quivered as she saw the look of pain and disappointment in little Mary's face; but she whispered, "Poor papa is so tired: my Mary will be good, I know."

And she was good, for she kept back the rising tears with an effort and a power of self-control perfectly marvellous in so young a child. Edith carried her into the nursery, for she never, when she could help it, trusted her in a servant's arms. It needed the utmost care and address to avoid giving pain to the small, wasted frame that sometimes could scarcely brook the tenderest touch.

When she came back Philip had already begun on the home-made seed-cake, and she hastened to pour out his tea. He took it in silence, and, opening his pocket-book, began to make calculations; and it was not till the meal was nearly over that he deigned to enter into conversation with his wife. Four years ago this strange moodiness would have made her nearly wild; but she was used to it now. She had learned many a lesson of patience and meekness since those early days of married life when Philip was always kind and loving, and

always ready, after a short absence, for an exchange of confidences.

But the good tea, and the comparatively cool room, and the rest, did him good in more ways than one; and presently he began to talk, saying that, notwithstanding that afternoon's disappointment, he thought the summer season would be more than ordinarily profitable; and if he could but conclude certain arrangements then in progress, the winter-time would bring with it an unprecedented flow of business.

When he had ceased speaking on this subject, Edith asked him if he knew anything about the Haughtons, for they were to leave Liverpool for a tour in Scotland on that very day; only Isabel had promised to come and see her before they went.

Philip answered in an emphatic tone—"I saw Edwin to-day, and they are not going yet. Estelle was with him, and she said, 'Dear Bella had had one of her little dainty whims, and the journey was postponed.' I tell you what, Edie, there will be a terrible flare-up there very soon. Things cannot go on as they are. Don't you have anything to do with it, pray. Let them fight their own battles; and battle-royal there will be before this summer is over."

"You think Isabel to blame?"

"Of course I do; but that Estelle is the very incarnation of all that is aggravating and exasperating. Ah! that marriage has turned out queerly. Well, there really is great truth in the saying, 'Marriage is a lottery:' don't you think so, my dear?"

CHAPTER XVI.

REMINISCENCES OF THE PAST.

THE next morning Edith received a little twisted note from Isabel. It said only:—"Dearest Edith, come and see me this afternoon, my carriage shall fetch you at four o'clock; bring little Mary with you, my boy wants to see her sadly. You *must* come, please; I want to talk to you very much. O! Edie, dear, I am in such trouble, I am nearly wild! Yours ever, Isabel. N.B. Estelle will be from home."

The messenger went away without waiting for an answer; and Edith sat folding and refolding the tiny missive in dire perplexity. Her own impulse led her to hasten to her friend; but then Philip, in anticipation of some catastrophe which seemed really impending, had warned her not to be mixed up with the Redcliffe House contests, and he might be displeased if she acted on her own responsibility. She ran down-stairs to speak to her husband; he was looking over some Greek classics just unpacked, and there was a mingled brightness and sadness on his countenance, which augured well for her errand: he was evidently in one of his softest moods; but it touched Edith to the heart, for it brought back to her memory those sweet sunny days of her early married life, when Philip had no moods, save those which were ever gentle, and confiding, and tender. He raised his head, as she entered the little counting-house, partitioned off from the general warehouse, and exclaimed, "Ah! you have caught me idling! I ought to be across the water now, for I have special business at Tranmere; but in looking over these books I lighted on one of my old favourites; and here I am, deep in Euripides, when I ought to be preparing an estimate for printing the new company's prospectuses. Heigho, Edie! those were pleasant

days, when I had time for study: do you remember my reading you my own translation of 'Iphigenia in Tauris?'"

"Ah! yes, very well. It was in the first winter evenings we ever spent together: it was just after we were married, when you were not quite so busy as you are now. And you translated, for my benefit, other of the tragedies of Euripides—'Orestes' and 'Medea,' and another about this same 'Iphigenia,' if I remember aright?"

"Yes! 'Iphigenia in Aulis.' Ah! those certainly were very pleasant times; I greatly enjoyed giving you the advantage of my scholarship, while you, silly little woman that you were, gloried in your husband's learning, as if it were something most rare and marvellous."

"Of course, I gloried in your learning. It is gratifying to know that one's husband's attainments are so far superior to one's own and to other people's generally. I always said, when I was a girl, I would never marry any man at whose feet I could not sit, and drink in knowledge and wisdom."

"Knowledge of a certain kind—yes! But wisdom?—ah! my dear, I fear I have not given you much of that. I always loved Latin and Greek from my earliest boyhood; but wisdom—ah! I fear I am, and have been, but sparingly endowed with it. Let me see, what does Cowper say on this very subject?

> 'Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one,
> Have ofttimes no connexion. Knowledge dwells
> In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
> Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
> Knowledge—a rude, unprofitable mass,
> The mere materials with which wisdom builds—
> Till smoothed, and squared, and fitted to its place,
> Doth but encumber whom it seems to enrich.
> Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much;
> Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.'

Truly, the bard of Olney was philosopher as well as poet! Well-a-day! to think how much *book-larning* a man may have and yet be a fool! Don't look so indignant, my dear; I am

not including myself in the category of fools; I hope I am not one of those who—

> 'Too weak to bear
> The insupportable fatigue of thought,
> Are swallowing therefore, without pause or choice,
> The total grist unsifted, husks and all.'"

"No, indeed; but, my dear, are you not perhaps just now neglecting '*book-larning*' rather too much? It seems to me that it needs communion with the past, as well as intercourse with the present, to make a thoroughly wise man."

"Perhaps so, Edie; but really I have no time for reading; it is lamentable to think how little leisure a man of business has for the cultivation of his intellectual powers. I feel quite savage when I look around me, and see books, books, books, before me, above me, and around me, just as Silvio Pellico saw prisons from the window of his own cell at Santa Margherita. I feel myself to be a second Tantalus, pining for the mental food and drink, which I behold in such profusion, but fail to appropriate. A hasty, unsatisfying snatch at the fruit and the nectar, like this morning's dip into Euripides, is all that falls to my share. *Ay de mi!*"

"Really, you are very brilliant this morning; you are actually quoting Spanish."

"Ah, my poor Spanish, that I used to be so proud of in my young days! Do you remember when I wanted to teach you Spanish, and began myself to compile a special grammar for your benefit?"

"Indeed I do; I shall never forget that dreadful *nos habriamos alabado!* What a delightful mess I made of that same verb, *alabarse!* And now I am ashamed to say I could not go through a single tense respectably; so you see you wasted your time on a very unprofitable subject."

"Well, I do not know that it was absolutely essential for you to learn Spanish; only just then I had a mania for languages, and I wanted you to share in all my pursuits. I wonder I did not urge upon you the study of Greek and Sanscrit, for I toiled pretty hard at the first, and dabbled in the last. I think I did bring you a Virgil?"

"Yes, you did; and Mrs. Glynn was highly scandalized thereby; she thought it very ungraceful and unfeminine in a woman to know anything of a dead language: she was so very caustic on the subject that I was glad to conceal from her the fact of my ability to make some sort of a scramble through Cæsar. And that reminds me, Philip, I have sadly forgotten my Latin, and I should like to freshen my memory a little by going through some of my old lessons; because, you see, baby will want to be taught, and if I could get him safely through the grammar, what a blessing it would be! Boys at school sometimes have a great deal to go through, from impatient and inconsiderate masters."

"You little goose! why don't you go and order his first tail-coat? He will want no Latin for these seven years; still, if you like it, and if you can find the time, and somehow you do manage to find time for everything, I will hunt up the old grammar and the Delectus; I know their whereabouts."

"I should like it if—if you, dearest, would help me a little. I know it would not be hard work for you, but only recreation, if sometimes, in the evening, you heard me construe a little. And O, Philip! it would be so nice, so like the dear old evenings in Myrtle-place, when you and I used to read together, and you taught me so much. There is nothing in the world so delightful as learning from one's own husband. Do think of it, dear, at least when the evenings begin to be longer. And Philip, you said you wanted me once to share in all your pursuits. Can it not be so? I ask no greater earthly pleasure than to take my part in all your anxieties, and hopes, and cares, and anticipations. My dear husband, there was a time when we shared every thought and feeling, and we were very happy in our simple, humble way; may I not know all your concerns again?"

And as Edith spoke, she drew very close to Philip, and twined her arms lovingly round his neck; for he was sitting at his desk, with his head bent down on his hand; her voice was tremulous, and her heart beat quickly; she was afraid he would repulse her, as he had done before now, and perhaps

turn coldly away, and beg her not to be sentimental. But he did not; he drew her closer to his side, and kissed her with a strange, regretful, passionate tenderness that made her tremble.

"What is it?" she asked, after a minute's silence. "O, Philip, dear, why do you look so?"

"Look how?" he asked, sadly.

"As if you were loving me in spite of yourself; as if you were yielding to old impressions, and old emotions, in spite of some strong, though silent influence. O! Philip, what is it that has come between us? what is that quiet, stern, undefinable something which has sprung up between us two, who, through all, love each other more than life? Shall it not be put away? shall it not be as it was in our first married days? Let me know all that is in your heart, Philip; am I not your wife, your own, part of your very self?"

He looked at her with a mournful, remorseful gaze; and he saw her soft, clear, brown eyes looking into his, with such truth, such tenderness, such womanly sweetness and trust! Surely Philip's good angel was pleading with him then; surely in that gentle voice, in those frank, beseeching looks, were influences purer, and higher, and happier than any others, save those which were Divine.

"Edith," he said presently, "my Edith—for you are right when you think that I love you more than life—you do not know what you ask; there would be much that would pain you, much that would sadly disappoint you."

"I can bear pain," she answered; "and nothing can disappoint me like missing your confidence."

"Really there is nothing to know after all," he resumed, presently; "that is, nothing that it can be your province to trouble yourself about. You see there are so many ins and outs in business that it would be perfectly impossible to explain past transactions to your satisfaction. I assure you, dear, it is for your sake that I allow myself to be so much engrossed; it is for you that I plan and scheme, and endure many risks; I want my wife to occupy the position which is hers by right."

"The right position, dear, is the one God gives us."

"Yes; but you would not say it is wrong in a man to try to better his condition, to raise his children in the social scale?"

"O, no; I suppose progress is natural to all but thoroughly narrow and stunted minds. I am sure it is not wrong to try and do the very best for one's self, and for one's family, even as regards the things of this world; but then one must try in a right spirit, in a lawful way; and there is always the difficulty of being quite sure what is the very best."

"O, as to that, leave me alone for discerning the very best, if I can only attain to it; and as for trying lawfully, I know that nothing keeps a man back like tricks in trade: I would be a poor man all my life rather than gain wealth at the expense of my conscience, my honour."

"That I am sure you would," replied Edith, warmly; "but, dear, I think to strive in worldly matters *quite* lawfully —one must not put them first: the best things must always come before them. And we must not be too anxious; we must always ask God's blessing on every endeavour, and trust Him to work out our destiny in the very best way for us."

"Ah, now you are getting beyond my depth; I believe you carry your religion into cutting bread and butter, and mending my old stockings."

"Why not?" she asked, brightly. "Do you not remember what George Herbert says?—

> 'A servant with this clause
> Makes drudgery divine:
> Who sweeps a room, as for Thy laws,
> Makes that and the action fine.'

And there is a higher authority that bids us eat and drink, and do all to the glory of God."

"Well, I must say one thing; you are a credit to religion; you are patient and industrious always; you don't go about the house with a long face, growling and grumbling, as some women saints make a point of doing. But I do not understand it. I may go to chapel, I may read a good book to the glory of God; but as for making out invoices, and posting up my

books, and taking stock after the same fashion, I must confess it seems an anomaly."

"You will not think so always," said Edith, with half a smile upon her lips, and half a tear in her voice.

"How do you know that, my dear?"

"Because every day, and many times in the day, I pray to God for you. I beseech Him to reveal Himself to your soul, to teach you by His Spirit, to fill your whole heart with His love, His truth, His joy—and it will be, it will be—though perhaps not just yet."

Philip was awed at her manner; there was an expression on her face that he had never seen before—an expression that he could not fathom.

"And you feel sure that God will answer your prayers?" he asked.

"I have faith," she replied, quietly; "I believe, I trust. Yes, I have no fears; at least, not often. God *will* make between us yet one more tie: He will bind us together yet more closely; He will make us one in Christ. United to Him, we shall be united to each other as we have never been hitherto; but it may be long first. I know for a certainty that my prayers will be answered, though when, where, and how I cannot tell, nor through what mazy ways and thorny paths He may lead us to the haven where we would be."

Philip sighed; dimly he began to enter into her meaning, but he hardened his heart. Not yet, not yet, could he give up all, take up his cross, and follow Christ. In the gentle words of his sweet wife, the Master was calling to him, saying, "Leave all, and follow Me." But the rebellious heart replied, "Some time, not now, not yet; I have much to do; my business, my secular matters, demand all my energies, all my time; I cannot come *now*." And the silent monitor within whispered, "*Now* is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." And for the rest of that week those words haunted him with a pertinacity which fairly baffled all his efforts to dismiss them from his mind.

He took out his watch. "My dear, I must go; I must catch the next boat; I must be off to the landing-stage this

minute. First Euripides, and then you, have beguiled me sadly this morning. I have not so played truant for a long, long time."

"One minute, Philip; I came to speak to you. See, I had this note from Isabel half an hour ago. Had I better go?"

"Well, yes, if you wish it; it seems unfriendly not to go to her when she is in trouble. But mind, Edie, I cannot have you mixed up with all that is going on there. Of course, Isabel will tell you everything; but do not attempt to interfere—do not advise her to take any step. And, really, I do not care for you to have any intercourse at all with Estelle; she will be out, the note says." The tone in which Philip spoke was significant.

"You do not mean," said Edith, colouring deeply, "that Estelle is worse than a mischief-maker—you do not think there is any real harm in her?"

"Harm in her, indeed! there is nothing but harm in her nature, I verily believe, though not the harm you are thinking of. No, it is her greed of admiration, her desire for power over every man she encounters, her determination to wield an irresistible influence over all around her, that make her the dangerous creature she is; but I tell you, Edith, when a woman is seized with this craving for admiration and for sway, she goes very far to imperil her own good name. Her singular intimacy with Edwin may not be wrong in the worst sense, but it is certainly discreditable."

"Why do you not tell Edwin so? He is your most intimate friend; a word from you might rouse him."

"No! I can do no good: there are certain points on which a man will brook no interference, and this is one of them. I cannot help the mischief that is doing, and I do not care to make an enemy of Estelle. And I really believe, Edie, he tells her everything; I wonder if he could buy a new meerschaum without consulting her!"

"Well, then, I may go?"

"O, yes, go by all means; the drive out will do you good, and Mary always enjoys a visit to West Derby. Only be careful; if you were not the discreetest little woman alive I

would not trust you. Good-bye, I shall not be back to dinner, and do not be late this evening."

He was gone, and Edith stood alone in the counting-house. Altogether she felt happy, happier than she had been for a long while. Long, long afterwards she remembered that morning's conversation, as a wearied Eastern traveller remembers the wells and palm-trees of the green oasis he has left behind him in the drear immeasurable desert. She long carried the memory of that hour of renewed softness and half confidence in her heart, like a precious amulet, that kept off the sense of utter darkness and dreariness and isolation.

She went back hopefully to the nursery, with almost the old girlish glee in her feelings, when she thought what a treat this visit would be to her darling little Mary.

CHAPTER XVII.

ISABEL'S BOUDOIR.

At four o'clock, punctual to the minute, came Mrs. Haughton's carriage, and Edith was quite ready and waiting, with little Mary in her arms. The afternoon was intensely warm, but something like a breeze came up from the river; and it was refreshing to Edith, pent up so long in the dusty, flowerless town, to see the green leaves and grassy fields once more, as she was borne swiftly and smoothly along the familiar West Derby-road.

"O, mamma!" said the child, as she nestled among the soft cushions that Isabel's kind forethought had provided, "how sweet it is! O! I wish I *could* get out and pick some of those pretty flowers in the meadow yonder; it must be so nice to gather flowers."

"You shall have as many as you please, darling. Mrs. Haughton has beautiful flowers, and she will let you have a fine nosegay to take home, I know: roses, and fuchsias, and

heliotropes, perhaps even one of those Japan lilies you admire so much."

"That will be very nice, mamma. But I should so like to *gather* some. Did you ever go in the fields, when you were a little girl, and gather flowers?"

"Many, many times. When I was a little girl I did not live in a town, but in a quiet country village, where there were but very few houses, and only one street, that was not at all like our busy Liverpool streets; but there were pleasant shady lanes all about, full of flowers, and trees, and mossy banks, and woods, like those at Eastham, only far bonnier; and a river, quite different from ours, not wider than this road, but winding in and out among rocks and woody hills, and through lovely valleys; its waters were so clear you could see the pebbles at the bottom, and the little fishes darting about, and close to the banks grew tall rushes and yellow water-flags, and in one little pool, that ran far into the land, almost like a tiny lake, there used to be snow-white water-lilies at this time of the year."

"How nice, mamma! Is it far away where you used to live?"

"Yes, it is in the north of Yorkshire, nearly a hundred miles away. The name of the village is Beckly; all round it are wild moors, that are purple with ling in the summer and autumn, and farther on to the north and west are the Westmoreland hills."

"Shall I ever go there, mamma?"

"I cannot tell, dearest; perhaps papa will take us all some day. I should like to see Beckly again; I was fifteen when I came away for good."

"Why did you come away, mamma? Why did you come to nasty noisy Liverpool?"

"Hush, my little one; mamma does not like to hear Liverpool abused; she loves it very much, for all its dust and noise. It is a grand place for a town, and there you know mamma first knew papa, and there her little Mary and Susie and baby came to her, and so it is a very dear place, dearer even than Beckly."

"But what made you leave that pretty Beckly? You couldn't care for Liverpool before you saw it. Did you come to find papa?"

"Not exactly," replied Edith, smiling; "I did not know that such a person as papa ever lived till long after I left Beckly. My own poor papa died; my mamma died when I was quite little, I scarcely remember her; and then it was found out that there was no money for me to live on, and that I must work and keep myself. I thought it very hard at first, but I soon got used to it. My uncle placed me in a ladies' school in Preston, not very many miles from here, you know; and there I taught the little ones, and learned lessons besides. I was what is called an articled pupil for two years; then I was junior teacher for a little while; then I had a situation at Everton, where I taught one little boy and one little girl, and very tiresome, naughty little children they were. I often sat down at night, after they were gone to bed, and cried to think how badly they behaved, and how miserable everything was. I soon left them, for I could do them no good, and I went to live with Mrs. Glynn, where I staid till papa took me away to live with him in Myrtle-place."

"Did you like papa the very first time you saw him?"

"I hardly remember, Mary; but I did like him as soon as I knew him. I was a poor lonely girl till he came and loved me; but you will understand all about it when you are a little older."

"Mamma, will anybody ever take me away, like papa took you away?"

Edith's heart grew sad within her. No! if her little Mary should live to woman's estate, no one would ever seek her in marriage; she might never see repeated, in her eldest daughter, the joys of those happy days when she and Philip were first betrothed lovers; no orange-flowers would deck her brow—poor hapless little Mary! After a pause, in which she gathered strength to meet the child's earnest gaze, she replied, "No, darling, I think no one will take you away from papa and mamma; no one will ever

love you as they do. But we cannot be quite sure, dear; only God knows, and He will do what is best and happiest for you."

"Then, mamma, why does not God let me walk about like other little girls?"

"I cannot tell you, dear; perhaps we shall never know till we get to heaven. One thing is certain, God loves you so much that if it were really good for you to walk, He would let you walk."

"But it *would* be good to walk, mamma: would it not, mamma?" And the child's dark expressive eyes filled with tears, and her earnest pleading voice told how the depths of her young nature were stirred within her.

Edith replied, "It seems to you, my Mary, that to walk like other children would be the best and happiest thing in the world; but you cannot be sure. Do you remember, a few months ago, how Susie cried to lay hold of the burning gas?"

"Yes, mamma; she was too little to know how it would burn and hurt; and it looked bright and pretty, I suppose."

"Well, why did I not let her do what she wished?"

"Ah, mamma, you knew it would have been cruel to let her burn her little fingers."

"And so God knows, my darling. Perhaps, if you could walk, you might go somewhere and get harm. He sees what would hurt you better than I can see what will hurt my little children, who are under my care. It is your cross, my darling; you will see it all some day. Have patience; God has something better in store for you. If your feet may never tread the dusty roads, or the pleasant fields of earth, they may tread the golden streets of heaven; they will, certainly, if you are Christ's little child."

"Mamma, I do ask Him to make me His own little child; and I think He will. I *do* love Him."

"No wonder, my darling, for He loves you more than any one else—more even than I do."

"It will be very nice to see Jesus Christ," said the child, thoughtfully. She was evidently accustomed to think of H[redacted]

as a living Saviour, her best and dearest Friend. Her short life had been all trial and discipline; perhaps it was to meeten her very early for the blessed life beyond the grave. Edith thought it might be so; and while her bosom heaved with pain at the thought, she knew that it would be "better far" for her precious one. Should she murmur if the Father took her fairest jewel into His own keeping? She thought of Longfellow's lovely poem, and recalled specially the two last verses:—

"And the mother gave, in tears and pain,
The flowers she most did love;
She knew she should find them all again
In the fields of light above.

O, not in cruelty, not in wrath,
The Reaper came that day;
'Twas an angel visited the green earth,
And took the flowers away."

But, in spite of all, she held her treasure more tightly, and felt that if indeed the kind angel came for her frail, drooping little blossom, the world for her would be very sad and lonely. The child's words had awakened so many sorrowful reflections, that she was glad when the villas of West Derby came in sight; and in two minutes more the carriage was at the door of Redcliffe House.

Isabel did not come out to welcome her as was her wont; but the servant said his mistress was not well, and was staying in her own sitting-room up-stairs; would Mrs. Proctor please to go there at once? Edith complied, carrying the child in her arms—she never trusted Mary to any stranger—and on the landing Isabel met her, and embracing her almost passionately, led the way to her own pretty boudoir, where every luxury and elegance that wealth could purchase, or taste devise and execute, was gathered together for her especial benefit. That moss-like carpet, those downy couches, that light graceful drapery, those delicate porcelain beauties, those well-chosen volumes, those choice flowers, that balcony glowing with richest hues, and breathing sweetest

fragrance, that lovely parterre beneath!—how different from Edith's hot, dusty drawing-room, with its fast-fading furniture, its general lack of ornament, and its view of busy, noisy Castle-street! And yet the Castle-street drawing-room, though its walls had witnessed many an hour of sad depression, of conflict, of weary disappointment, and of patient endurance, was a palace of happiness compared with Isabel's exquisite retreat. Though ofttimes Philip tried his gentle wife very sorely, yet her trust in him never wavered; she knew that he loved her more than any other creature; even in his coldest, sternest moods, she was certain that all the love, all the tenderness he had to give was hers, and hers alone. And through all she loved him, deeply, passionately, unselfishly, and unwaveringly, with all the strength of her true woman's heart. Happy Edith, with all her trials! unhappy Isabel, with all her wealth, and all her appliances of luxury and refinement!

Mary being carefully accommodated in the most luxurious of easy chairs in Isabel's comfortable nursery, and in charge of Isabel's staid, kind, sensible nurse, Edith was at liberty to bestow all her time and attention upon her friend. She had scarcely taken off her bonnet and seated herself in one of Isabel's nice cushioned rocking-chairs, when Mrs. Haughton began:—"Edith! I think I shall go crazy!"

"I hope not, dear; but why?"

"Why?—why? Ah, Edith! how can you ask? I am miserable, utterly miserable! I wish my heart would break, that there might be an end of it. Ah, Lord Byron never wrote a truer line than this—

'The heart will break, yet brokenly live on!'

I am sure mine is broken, and yet I live—live on, aimlessly, wretchedly, hopelessly! O! why was I born into this miserable world? Why was I singled out from my kind to bear such torture? I who am so formed to love and to be loved, why was I mocked with such a vision of happiness? Never stood at the altar a happier, more trusting bride—

and now! Ah! Edith, it is too hard; even your calm happiness makes me feel bitter."

"I am not without my trials, dear Isabel; my married life is not so cloudless as you imagine; no one lives exactly the sort of life you anticipated in your girlish days. There is a crook in every lot, a shadow on every pathway through this world. Be patient, dear; keep innocency, do the thing that is right, and wait till the brightness comes back again. The darkest night gives place to dawn; the wildest tempest precedes a calm; the heaviest toil, sooner or later, is followed by rest."

"Not for me, Edith; there can be no more brightness for me. I shall cease to struggle soon; I feel that I am becoming indifferent to everything. This morning I was reading something that so perfectly interpreted my own feelings that I was fairly startled. Listen!" And Isabel took up a richly-bound and illustrated copy of "Childe Harold," that lay by her side. "Listen:—

'They mourn, but smile at length; and, smiling, mourn:
The tree will wither long before it fall;
The hull drives on, though mast and sail be torn;
The roof-tree sinks, but moulders on the hall
In massy hoariness; the ruin'd wall
Stands when its wind-worn battlements are gone;
The bars survive the captive they enthral;
The day drags through, though storms keep out the sun,
And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on:

Even as a broken mirror, which the glass
In every fragment multiplies; and makes
A thousand images of one that was,
The same, and still the more, the more it breaks;
And thus the heart will do, which not forsakes,
Living in shatter'd guise; and still, and cold,
And bloodless, with its sleepless sorrow aches,
Yet withers on till all without is old,
Showing no visible sign, for such things are untold.'

That is what I shall come to, Edith. I see before me the withered life of which the poet speaks; perhaps in apathy I shall find rest, if not content."

"Isabel," said Edith, gravely, but very tenderly, "will you grant me a favour?"

"That I will, Edie; ask what you will of me, it shall be granted."

"Then let me take away with me this volume of Byron, and promise me not to replace it."

"Why, Edith? O, you cannot mean it. It is such a comfort to find one's own feelings so exactly delineated; it is a consolation to know that others have suffered the same pain."

"I do not quite see the consolation, dear; if Byron had suffered, and endured, and at last achieved a perfect calm, it might indeed be so. But I tell you, Isabel, Byron's poetry is just poison in your present state of mind. When one is miserable, a miserable introspection of one's own feelings is the very worst occupation you can find for yourself. Years ago, I have heard Philip say, Byron's poetry was all the rage, and it was fashionable to fancy one's self miserable, and withered, and despairing. I am glad that we have come to a more sensible state of things."

"Ah, Edith! you are so philosophic. But if you take Byron away, what will you give me instead?"

"I will give you one of my own favourites; this—

'Give to the winds thy fears;
Hope, and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs, and counts thy tears;
God shall lift up thy head.

Through waves, through cloud, through storms
He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou His time, so shall the night
Soon end in joyous day.'"

"That may be all very well for you, Edith; but it does not apply to me: I am not God's child."

"Then why not come to Him at once, Isabel? Believe me, whatever may be your sorrow, your wrongs, your weariness, in Him you will find rest. If you did but know how the soul that rests on Christ is kept in perfect peace, you would

hesitate no longer. You would say of that trust, and that repose:—

'It hallows every cross,
It sweetly comforts me;
Makes me forget my every loss,
And find my all in Thee!'

I shall never forget the day when I first could say that for myself."

"I wish I could say it too. But, Edith, my cross is so hard to bear; either I must submit to every species of covert indignity and neglect, or I must be engaged in petty warfare from week's end to week's end."

"What is wrong now, dear?"

"The old tale—the old tale, that I am sick of telling, that you must be wearied with hearing. You know, I had planned a journey to the Irish Lakes this summer; but Edwin opposed the scheme, merely, I am sure, out of perversity. Well, Edie, I thought of your counsel; I thought of what you said about the power of meekness and the strength of patience, and I quelled my rising anger, and tried not even to feel annoyed, and I asked him where he would like to go. He did not seem to care; but Estelle said, 'I am sure the Highlands would be just the thing; the scenery would delight Isabel; you could fish, and I could sketch.' Well! since I could not see Killarney as I wished, I thought Loch Lomond and Loch Katrine would be the next best thing; and I fell in with their plan straightway, and made arrangements accordingly. I settled the route; for my friends, the Harleys, were there all last summer, and from them I knew the best directions in which to travel, and the very best places for head-quarters; and I was quite in spirits about the journey, and so pleased that I had yielded without a battle in which I should have been sure to lose. And then Estelle, after tracing the route on the map, and consulting the guide-book, found out that there were a thousand difficulties in the way of my schemes, and proposed an entirely different line of procedure. I grew very angry, and told her I would go the way I chose, and no other; but, as usual, she made her own

representations to Edwin in her quiet, persuasive way, saying that, of course, she must cede the point; but it was such a pity dear Isabel would not hear reason, et cætera. And it ended, as such contentions always do, in Edwin adopting her views, and determining to carry them out. Then I was fairly roused, and I refused to leave home at all, and Edwin at first laughed at me, and then became seriously displeased; and now it is more than a week since he has spoken to me or taken the least notice of me; and Estelle treats me with a kind of superior pity. But I told her this morning I would be called Mrs. Haughton by her, and not 'Isabel dear love!' and 'my cousin dear!' and 'Isabel sweet!' And I have taken all my meals here since Sunday: I will not sit like a cipher at my own table, and hear my own husband and Estelle converse on the topics of the day with the most charming piquancy, and with such marvellous unanimity of feeling on every subject. Edith, what would you do in my place?"

But Edith, remembering Philip's caution, was very glad to be spared the necessity of a reply, by the appearance of Isabel's own maid, with the tea equipage, and with little Alfred running after her, to ask if he and Mary might not be allowed to take tea with their mammas. The answer was a ready affirmative, and so, for the time, the painful and delicate subject of Isabel's perplexities was entirely dropped.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PORTENDING SORROWS.

EDITH came back to her noisy town-home with a keener appreciation than ever of its comforts and blessings. She stood alone in her own drawing-room, now deep in shadow, for the twilight was far advanced, contrasting it with Isabel's elegant boudoir, without one pang of regret. True, the gas-lights from the streets showed rather a common and dingy paper on the walls: the covers of the chairs and of the sofa were none the better for five and a half years' wear and tear, and for the little feet and fingers that sometimes made sad havoc, in spite of all mamma and Matty's care and watchfulness. All the pretty things that she had set such store by, when she first began housekeeping in Myrtle-place, were either shabby or defunct by this time; and the carpet, that had been bought new when they moved to Castle-street, had long since lost its pristine freshness, and boasted now of many clever darns, that Miss Wilson declared were perfect works of art, they blended so artistically with the original pattern. And yet, humble as that town drawing-room looked and was, its mistress glanced round upon it with a pleasant smile; it was home—and home uninvaded by any antagonistic influence, such as darkened the splendid mansion of which poor Isabel was called, ah! only *called*, mistress. And cold as Philip sometimes seemed, and engrossed heart and soul in that tyrant business, he was all her own; and till the warm summer twilight deepened in comparative darkness, Edith staid alone, musing on all she had heard, pitying poor Isabel with all her heart, almost loathing Estelle, despising Mr. Haughton, and exulting in the superior goodness and kindness of her own husband. That

morning's conversation in the counting-house seemed to have given back to her the Philip of earlier days.

Presently the striking of the Exchange clock roused her from her reverie; it struck ten, and the gas was not yet lighted, and what could Matty be thinking of, that there were no signs of supper? And where was Mr. Proctor? He had said something about returning home in good time; and his habits were so regular that, unless he had some special engagement, ten o'clock was considered anything but early. So Edith hastened up-stairs, and laid aside her bonnet; then she went into the night-nursery, and saw all her treasures safely laid in their little beds. Baby and Susie were fast asleep; but Mary's dark eyes were wide open; her mother feared the excitement of the visit and the drive home would effectually banish the repose which was so necessary to her weary little frame, for the child had her bad nights, and her restless feverish days, like an invalid of older years.

Lastly, Edith went into the kitchen to inquire why supper was not forthcoming; and Matty replied that she thought her mistress had supped at Mrs. Haughton's, as was generally the case, when she spent the evening there.

"Yes, I have supped," replied Edith; "that is, I have had some fruit and biscuits, and I do not want anything more to-night; but your master will be in directly, and will be sure to expect to find the cloth laid and the supper ready."

Both Matty and the nursemaid looked up in profound astonishment as their mistress spoke; and Matty exclaimed, "Laws, ma'am, master's been a-bed these two hours!"

"Your master in bed?" returned Edith, incredulously. "What bed is he in?"

"Just in his own," said Matty, surprised in her turn, for she knew Mrs. Proctor had just come out of her own room; and that master should be in bed, and missus not discover the fact, was a problem sufficiently curious.

"Give me a light," said Edith. "I went into my room in the dark, certainly; I thought I could see well enough by the gas in the street. Why, I threw my bonnet, and my

mantle, and my bagful of things on the bed, without any ceremony!"

"Well, master is in the bed, for certain," returned Matty; "leastways, he said he was going to bed, and I saw him go into his room with my own eyes; and I am sure he has not come out again. It was nigh upon eight o'clock when he went, and I thought, may be, he had the headache, so I kept the house very quiet, and didn't grind the coffee for to-morrow morning."

"What time did he come home?"

"About six, I should say; and he had tea, and Mr. Robert had it with him, and they got out the big books as master keeps in the iron safe, and were at 'em I don't know how long; I only know they kept tea about a matter of two hours; and Mr. Robert, he went down, and saw to shutting up the shop; and master, he rang the bell for me to carry out the things, and went straight away to bed; and just fit for bed he looked, white-like, and fagged to death."

By this time Edith had a lighted taper in her hand, and bidding the girls be very quiet, she stole off on tip-toe to investigate the mystery. When she entered her own room, the first thing she saw was her bonnet on the floor; that indeed went far to prove that the bed was occupied; and peeping between the curtains, she soon perceived that Matty's statement was correct. There indeed was Philip, his face buried in his pillow, and the bed-clothes in so wild a state of confusion, that it was very easy to account for the dislodgment of the bonnet. Edith put her light on one side, and bent down gently over her husband; there was an undefinable something in his attitude, and in his whole appearance, which convinced her that he was wide awake, and yet he never spoke or seemed conscious of her presence. She began to feel frightened: suppose he were suddenly taken very ill. The longer she watched the more positive she became that he was not asleep, not even dozing; and she stood by the bedside trembling and irresolute, fearing to disturb him, and yet dreading to leave him any longer in what might be a serious state of indisposition.

Suddenly, with an impatient gesture, he turned. "What are you about, Edith? How you disturb me! It must be quite late. Why do you not come to bed, and be quiet?"

Be quiet, indeed! Why, she had stolen into the room as cautiously as though she had been on a predatory expedition; she had been literally holding her breath while, in her anxiety, she had watched his real or supposed slumbers. A pussy-cat stealing cream could not have been much quieter. But she only said, "I will be as quiet as I can, my dear. But what is the matter? you are unwell, I am sure." And she laid her hand lightly on his forehead, and pushed back the rich masses of dark curling hair that overhung it; but he did not seem exactly to appreciate her attention.

"O my head!" he exclaimed, pettishly. "Do take your hot hands away, my dear. And do try if you cannot settle the bed a little more comfortably; it must have been shockingly made this morning."

"You must have been dreaming that you were making hay, I should think," returned Edith, good-humouredly; "the clothes look just as if they had been pitched about with a rake and a hay-fork; and O! you have my new silk mantle all twisted under you! Philip, dear, you must be very feverish; I never knew you toss about in this fashion before."

"I have a headache, I tell you! and, altogether, I am out of sorts. How you women do talk! clack, clack, by day and by night! As for your mantle, you should take more care. You threw it on the bed quite heedlessly; you never stopped to see whether I was there or not."

"How could I imagine such a thing?" replied Edith, getting a little out of patience. "I did not know you were come home even; and when you saw that I was quite unconscious of your presence, why did you not speak?"

But Philip vouchsafed no answer; he punched the pillows savagely, and dragged up the counterpane as if he were egregiously offended at its conduct, exclaiming, at the same time, "Why do you stand there, Edith? Just make the bed decent, will you? and take all the blankets away, and open the windows; it is insufferably hot."

So her resolution was taken. Her husband was not a man to be trifled with; what he required he would have, from his wife, at least; and if he demanded another supply of brandy, it was vain to refuse to fetch it, or to deny him the keys—he was not to be baffled when he had once resolved upon any course of action. So, taking the bottle in her hand, she went downstairs to a back room behind the counting-house, where there was a small leaden sink, and accommodation for washing hands. And there she poured out, to the very last drop, the remaining brandy, and, putting away the empty bottle, began to think of going to bed herself, though what kind of night she might spend she dared not think. She could not banish from her mind the horrible suspicion of her husband's sudden insanity.

She went into the kitchen and told the servants to retire; but taking Matty aside, she said, "If I should call you in the night come quickly, Matty; I am afraid about your master, he seems very unwell; he may require medical aid before morning."

"Trust me, ma'am!" replied Matty; "I sleep always like a watch-dog, with one ear open. But don't go to be scared, ma'am: you look as white as the arrowroot blanc-mange I've just been a-making for Miss Mary; and master, he looked just like a ghost before he went to bed: Mr. Robert went off in high feather, though!"

"Good night, Matty; I hope I shall not have occasion to disturb you."

And then Mrs. Proctor went to the nursery, to take her accustomed last survey, and to fetch the baby, who, after the fashion of babies in general, preferred passing the night in the immediate vicinity of his mamma. But as she was taking up the little cradle, baby and all, as she frequently did, a sudden thought struck her: Philip and the baby might not agree so well as usual; she would leave him to the care of Jane, for that one night, and devote herself to keeping sole watch and ward over her husband, whose proceedings and manner seemed the more unaccountable the more she thought about them. How different the Philip of to-night from the Philip

of the morning—the intellectual, scholarly Philip—the reasonable, affectionate husband, whose converse she had so thoroughly enjoyed! She had never read Bulwer's "Night and Morning;" but here was a morning and night of her own, and quite of the sensation order too!

She found Philip still pacing the room, but evidently growing drowsy, and she had little difficulty in persuading him to lie down. She left the gas a little alight, but sedulously interposed the curtain between it and Philip's face; and when she lay down herself, she found that he was already fast asleep, or perhaps sunk in insensibility from the effects of his unwonted potation. Slowly passed the weary hours, while Edith, as sleepless as she had been at noon, pondered over all that had occurred that evening. Why had Robert been closeted with his master? And O! why had Philip disregarded her entreaties, and retained the services of that young man? She had hoped that when his apprenticeship expired he would be dispensed with, and Philip had half promised that it should be so; but when the time came he was, at his own request, engaged as regular assistant, and since then he had seemed more than ever indispensable to the business, and useful and serviceable to Mr. Proctor. And certainly he was indefatigable, and seemed to make his master's interests his own; he had business talents too, a judgment that was evidently sound, and industry that was proverbial. He was changed, moreover, from the sullen youth of other days: manhood had brought with it control of temper and better sense; and it was very rarely now that his surly moods came over him. In the shop he was polite, almost obsequious; in the warehouse, and among the printers, obliging and generally good-humoured; to Edith herself, most deferential. And yet, more than ever, she distrusted Robert Anderson; and she saw that he was perfectly aware of her distrust, and secretly and deeply resented it.

It was vain now to think of alarming Philip; he was quite confident in his assistant's integrity and efficiency, and the last time the subject had been discussed between them it had ended in something very like a quarrel; but more and more

Edith felt assured that the young man had ends of his own to answer, and she was quite certain that he regarded her, as he had done from the very first, with aversion, little short of absolute hatred. That some evil would finally accrue from his continuance with them, she never doubted; and now, as she lay awake, listening to the stertorous breathing of her companion and the striking of the various clocks round about, she felt frightened to think how completely he had wormed himself into Philip's confidence; how entirely he knew the whole working of the business, and how thoroughly, if anything happened to her husband, she would be in his power. And to think that that very evening they had been going over the books together—what could the man possibly have to do with his master's private accounts? And so the weary hours of the short summer night passed away, and the grey dawn broke over the restless Mersey and its populous shores, and then Edith rose from her sleepless couch and looked down on the quiet streets, and on the brightening sky, where already the first red streaks of sunrise were apparent, while the morning star grew faint and pallid before the rosy blushes of the beauteous Aurora. She watched till the gilt figure on the Exchange dome shone all ruddy in the red morning beams, and then she went back to her pillow and fell asleep. Her slumbers, however, were short and by no means pleasant: she dreamed that Robert had turned them all out of the house, taking oath that the business was his, and showing a legal document duly signed by Philip in huge characters, making over to him the stock, the trade, the house, and all it contained. And then the scene changed, and she was tormented by one of those perplexing dreams that are so miserably real because they involve so much truth. She thought herself simply awake, for she was in her own bed, with Philip by her side, tossing uneasily in his sleep and muttering to himself words she could not catch; and then he suddenly started up, raving like a confirmed lunatic, and, seizing the baby, prepared to throw it headlong from the window. She sprang up with a wild cry that roused both herself and Philip—O! what a comfort to find it had been but a dream! She could not sleep again, so at the

first sound of movement in the house she got up and dressed, and slipped away to the nursery, leaving her husband again buried in profound slumbers, which, however, were less disturbed than they had been through the night.

At eight o'clock, as he did not appear, she took him a large cup of tea, which he drank greedily, saying he was parched with thirst, and his head ached to distraction; no wonder, thought Edith, after last night's libations. He was evidently only suffering from the effects of the brandy, otherwise he was quite well, and perfectly sane.

And now, in broad daylight, and freed from the apprehensions which had haunted her on the previous evening, Mrs. Proctor began seriously to reflect upon her husband's strange conduct. She made up her mind that he had not been either ill or crazy, but that, something very momentous had transpired, which he had not yet chosen to communicate.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONGRATULATIONS.

PHILIP seemed in no wise inclined to get up; the morning wore on, and still he was missing in shop and counting-house, and the children were told they must be very quiet, for poor papa had a bad headache; and the servants, noticing their mistress' grave looks and absent manner, were convinced that something unusual had happened, or was about to happen. Matty, indeed, kept her conjectures to herself—she was too faithful a servant to chatter about business that did not concern her, and she rebuked Jane with no little asperity when she remarked that "something was up, she was sure—master wasn't used to lie a-bed early and late; and missis looked as if she'd never closed her eyes all through the night, and yet the doctor wasn't sent for!"

Edith went about with a heavy heart, discharging the

duties of the day; she gave the children their breakfast, and administered to her husband a second cup of strong tea, which he impatiently demanded; then she superintended Matty's preparations for dinner, and finally began to pick her fruit for the preserving pan, while the fire was burning up to a proper heat. Just as she had finished a goodly pile of red currants, brought the previous evening from Isabel's kitchen-garden, the shop boy burst in and announced that there was company in the drawing-room.

"What company?—who?" asked Edith, looking at her thoroughly-stained hands, and feeling extremely averse to receiving company on that particular morning. "Did you not ask the name?"

"It isn't exactly company," replied the youth; "it's only one lady—it's Miss Drummond."

"Strange!" thought Edith to herself. "Estelle knows I distrust and dislike her; I am sure she does! She never visits me if she can help it. What can bring her here now? No good, I am certain."

She ran into the nursery and washed her hands, and simply taking off the print apron she always wore when pursuing her domestic avocations, went down into the drawing-room, where sat Estelle Drummond, all smiles and sunshine, and so exquisitely dressed that Edith, in spite of herself, could not but pay secret and involuntary homage to her perfect taste in the feminine art of personal adornment. But Estelle was not alone: a gentleman was leaning familiarly on Philip's own chair, and talking with so much earnestness that he was not aware of Mrs. Proctor's entrance, till Estelle rose and extended her little daintily-gloved hand, and, in a voice of silvery sweetness, made the usual conventional inquiries. And then Edith saw, to her profound astonishment, that Miss Drummond's companion was no other than Robert Anderson, her husband's assistant and quondam apprentice, on whom her mind had so painfully dwelt only a few hours before. His presence there troubled her strangely; it seemed, in her wearied state of body, and in her apprehensive state of mind, a circumstance of evil omen.

How came he there? He had never been on such good terms with Mrs. Proctor as to venture on entering the drawing-room, uninvited, or without special business. He had always, as Matty said, "known his place and kept his distance," and now he was lolling over the back of the easy-chair with all the confidence imaginable, and talking to Estelle with an easy assurance that might have deluded a stranger into taking him for the head of the establishment. He nodded a friendly good morning to Edith, and, to her extreme surprise, maintained his position. And Edith, on her part, felt as if the whole world were turning topsyturvy. Was the day to be as strange as the night? Or was it she, and not Philip, who was threatened with insanity? Had she lost her senses on the West Derby-road, coming back to Liverpool? Finding that Mr. Anderson showed no signs of returning to his own proper territories, Edith put on a certain dignity she knew very well how to assume, and, in her most freezing tones, desired the young man to postpone his business for the present, as Mr. Proctor was still indisposed, and had desired to remain undisturbed.

He looked at her with genuine surprise; but the next moment his countenance lowered, and the old look of cunning and hate came over it, and he regarded Edith with an expression that terrified her, while it roused her indignation to the utmost. What could he mean? What did he dare to mean? There was defiance in that glance; in that sullen aspect there was hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. The scowl on his dark, angry countenance said, as plainly as looks could speak—and these are sometimes far more expressive than words—"I hate you: I defy you; you are in my power; I will be even with you yet." And what could Estelle find to talk about with Robert? Hitherto, at least so she believed, they had never spoken to each other, except across the counter: altogether poor Edith felt mystified and annoyed.

However, Mr. Anderson did not choose to provoke a second intimation that his absence was preferable to his company; he bowed politely to Estelle, and left the room; and now Mrs.

Proctor began again to revert to her first source of inquiry—what was the reason of this unexpected visit?—for that Miss Drummond came for a specific purpose she had not the smallest doubt.

"You are not looking yourself this morning," said Estelle, with her most winning of airs and her sweetest of smiles; "ah! it is this close, sultry atmosphere. I know there is thunder in the air; I told Isabel so this morning when she would persist in driving herself in the pony carriage to Allerton. However, she would not listen to my warning, and she is gone without even a parasol to shelter her if the storm should come on. Ah, well! when people are obstinate it is sometimes the best way to leave them to themselves."

"I think it is always the best way," said Edith, gravely; "and I dare say Isabel, like all other married women, prefers acting upon her own responsibility."

"O! what doctrine!" cried Estelle, pretending to be shocked. "Why, Mrs. Proctor, I thought you, of all women, would be the last to advocate feminine autocracy. I have heard you more than once argue most strongly in favour of conjugal submission."

"Conjugal submission, yes!" said Edith, with a quiet emphasis Miss Drummond could not misunderstand. "I do think every woman should obey her husband; it is God's law, and the law of nature; and that house, wherein the wife is chief ruler, is sure to lack happiness, if not prosperity; the law of God, which constitutes the husband the *head* of the wife, cannot be set aside with impunity. But if married women are subject to their husbands, they are not, or ought not to be, subject to any one else. That was what I intended to convey by my remark. Neither ought the husband to be under any influence—especially any female influence—but that of his wife. As for any adverse or antagonistic influence, he ought to repel its first advances with equal firmness and contempt."

Miss Drummond changed colour more than once as Edith spoke—she could not pretend to be unconscious of the tendency of her remarks, and she was a good deal surprised;

she had no idea that meek, docile little woman had so much spirit in her, only she supposed Isabel had been pouring out one of her senseless, interminable tales on the preceding evening—perhaps she had even requested her friend to deliver an exordium on the immunities of married ladies from all rule, direct or indirect, save that of their own liege lords. Certainly, if it were so, Mrs. Proctor had spoken very much to the purpose; but Miss Drummond was not the woman to be easily daunted; besides, she believed she had a fine rod in soak for Mrs. Edith; she should have her say, and then it would be her—Estelle's—turn to make sundry little observations far more startling than agreeable. So for the present she reined in her displeasure, and did her best to conceal her annoyance. She simply replied, "O yes, yes; I quite agree with you, Mrs. Proctor; doubtless you have had some little annoyance of the kind yourself, you speak so feelingly. You see, being unmarried myself, I cannot fully sympathize, as Isabel might if you were talking the matter over with her."

Edith felt perfectly confounded at Miss Drummond's cool effrontery, and listened in amaze as she continued:—

"But, though I agree with you on the whole, I think that there are cases that may form the exception to the rule. Let us suppose one: a sensible man marries a beautiful and perhaps loving young thing, and finds, after the few first months of marriage, that so far from sharing in all his pursuits and sentiments, as he once fondly hoped she would, she gives herself up to frivolous pursuits of her own, yields to petty jealousies and violence of temper, and certainly contributes very little to his domestic felicity. Then we will suppose this unfortunate husband has a friend, it may be a relative, whose tastes are congenial with his own, who possesses those very qualifications in which his wife is unhappily deficient. Is this friend to refuse to use her influence for the better conduct of the household, for the guidance of the wife, who seems incapable of guiding herself?"

"She will refuse, if she be a wise woman," said Edith,

gravely; "it must be a very rare and exceptional case which can warrant any kind of interference between husband and wife. I think when such interference is undertaken it is from a love of power, a desire of influence, whether legitimate or otherwise. I think it never answers: it ends but too frequently in the estrangement of those whom God has joined together, and sometimes in the shame and discomfiture of her who, by her arts and vanity, applies her talents to the profanation of domestic—nay, more, conjugal privacy."

"You speak strongly, Mrs. Proctor," said Estelle, with difficulty repressing her violent anger, and at the same time chuckling to think of how the tables were to be turned before her visit was at an end, and determined also to repeat the whole conversation to Edwin, and to lay the matter before him, and caution him against countenancing the close intimacy which existed between his wife and Edith. And when Estelle spoke, even to herself, of counselling Edwin against countenancing any pursuit or project of Isabel's, it meant persuading him to use his authority in that especial direction.

"Yes," replied Edith, "I do speak strongly on this subject, but not so strongly as I feel. Words cannot express my abhorrence of such characters as we have been discussing. One is tempted to think the very worst of them. And how any woman, who is not the sister of the man over whom she has usurped such undesirable sway, can bear to contemplate the liberties that will be taken with her character, I cannot imagine. In her heart she may—yes, I think she may guard her womanly purity with all zeal and circumspection, but she lays herself open to grave, very grave suspicions; a woman's character does not bear handling. It is, to say the least of it, an indiscretion in any woman to maintain primary sway over any man who is not her husband, her betrothed, or her very near relation. She cannot do it without offending against the just laws of social life—she endangers her reputation."

"Mrs. Proctor, what do you mean?" said Estelle, very red and hot. "You speak with so much stress that one would suppose you intended a personal application."

"I mean exactly what I say, and no more; certainly no less. If you know any one who is thus setting at defiance the law of kindness and of marriage ties, and of propriety, you will do well to represent the danger in which such a person must be placed, not only from her equivocal position, but from the displeasure of God, who will certainly visit for such heartless, sinful treachery." Edith spoke so gravely and so composedly that Estelle felt she could not take up her own defence. After all, she might be thinking of some other persons. But the time was passing, and it was necessary that she should prepare for departure; therefore it behoved her to discharge the poisonous shaft by which she intended to murder Edith's peace of mind.

"Well," she said, plaiting the fringe of her gay little parasol as she spoke, "I must be going, for I have an engagement to lunch at Aigburth. Really, you have quite beguiled me into all this chat and confabulation. I did not mean to stay ten minutes: I was in the shop, ordering Tennyson's new poem, and Miss Murdoch's new novel, and I thought I would just come up-stairs and offer my congratulations. Isabel is so jealous if she thinks you are at all neglected."

"I am much obliged to Mrs. Haughton," said Edith, "but there must be some mistake; nothing has happened, I believe, since the birth of my little boy, upon which I can possibly be congratulated, and I have seen you half a dozen times since I came down-stairs."

"How unconscious you look!" cried Estelle, merrily, secretly exulting over the unconsciousness, about which she had been rather uncertain. Edith had looked so pale and worn on entering the room that it seemed more than probable she had heard the tidings of which she hoped to be the bearer. "Now you need not pretend to look so innocent, my dear Mrs. Proctor; I am in the secret. Besides, now that the deed is done, why make a mystery about it? The whole world will hear of it before the end of next week."

"May I beg you, Miss Drummond, to speak plainly?" said Edith, with some dignity. "I am entirely at a loss to know to what you can allude. There is some mistake."

"Now, Mrs. Proctor, really you are too bad! and I actually, if the truth must be spoken, came on purpose to congratulate you;—you are quite unkind."

"And I repeat," replied Edith, trying to speak and feel with dignified composure, but in spite of herself apprehensive and sick at heart—"I repeat I am not at present in a position to require congratulations, unless, indeed, Mr. Anderson has told you of some marvellous good order that has arrived this morning, and of which I am still ignorant; but then you say you came on purpose to congratulate me. Pray explain!"

Estelle saw that she was torturing her victim to her heart's content, so she was in no hurry to explain; she felt very like a cat must feel, who means to get all the entertainment she can out of the unfortunate mouse that has fallen into her clutches, and feels the utmost satisfaction in knowing that she can eat him up at any moment she chooses. So she replied, looking very sweetly and archly all the time, "Well, it is just possible it may be an event on which you require condolence rather than congratulation; but I suppose Mr. Proctor talked it well over with you before deciding. Or it may be altogether a matter of indifference."

Edith's patience was fairly exhausted; once more she said, "I am still quite ignorant of your drift. Have the goodness to state, in one word, *upon what* you came here to congratulate me?"

"Why, one would really think you were indeed in the dark, only it is impossible. I congratulate you on the new partnership, which I think must in every way be so highly advantageous."

"The *what?*" said Edith, springing up from her chair, and facing her merciless tormentor. A light—a miserable light—was breaking in upon her perceptions: that word "partnership" gave in one moment a clue to the mysteries of the last few hours.

For one minute only Estelle was daunted; she soon recovered her inimitable *sang-froid*, and exclaimed, "Did you not know? Were you really in ignorance of the business

that has been transacting between your husband and Mr. Anderson? Is it indeed true that I am the first to disclose the fact? O, I am so sorry! Mr. Proctor will not soon forgive me, I fear; of course he had his own reasons for not speaking to you on the subject. Really your little lecture on interference might have been provisional. I have interfered to some purpose: I have regularly put my foot into it, as that old bore Mr. Glynn used to say, in bygone times, according to Isabel's testimony."

Edith sat down again, simply because she could not stand —the room seemed swimming round and round; Estelle's voice sounded afar off; it was only by the strongest effort of the will that she saved herself from fainting. She was obliged to hold the table lest she should join in the wild dance that the sofa and the chiffonnière seemed to be performing. She hoped Estelle did not see it; she would not for the world have yielded to the emotions that were all but uncontrollable. Gradually, however, she became calmer; that fierce endeavour to keep back all womanly tears and laments and weaknesses was successful. In two minutes she could let go the table, and sit upright, and ask Estelle on what authority she made the statement.

"On Mr. Haughton's authority," said Estelle, pretending to pout a little at Edith's arbitrary tone of inquiry; "he was here last night, and had a long conversation with Mr. Proctor and with Mr. Anderson. I had the pleasure of congratulating Mr. Anderson myself as he very politely escorted me up-stairs—he seems very well pleased at the prospects of the new firm. 'Proctor and Anderson'—really it sounds very well, does it not? Of course your husband is, and always will be, the senior partner so long as he lives, but Mr. Anderson is the monied man, I believe."

Yes, that was true, though Edith knew very little about it. She had heard of some good fortune happening to Robert Anderson, some unexpected legacy; but she did not know that in reality it was a windfall of several thousand pounds. He had kept silence himself, and imposed silence on Philip, as soon as the project of the partnership was disclosed: he

knew well enough that, if Edith were consulted, tens of thousands would not buy him the position he coveted.

At length Estelle rose to go, to Edith's infinite relief. "Good-bye," she said. "I am so sorry I have told the secret. Make my peace with Mr. Proctor, pray, and beg him to accept the congratulations you seem bent upon refusing. How sultry it is! I wish a storm would come to clear the air. I see you feel it; it makes you look quite tired and pallid, and no wonder. Castle-street is dreadfully close; you will not be sorry to leave it. My kindest regards to Mr. Proctor, and love to the chicks. Shall I give your best love to Isabel?"

"Thank you," was all Edith could say—with a mighty effort she endured her visitor's parting salutation—and then she was alone.

CHAPTER XX.

LOST! LOST! LOST!

YES, Edith was alone at last, and she felt as if one more sentence of Estelle's would have driven her to the verge of insanity; and yet solitude, when it arrived, seemed in no way to recall her scattered senses, or to restore that composure for which she had so earnestly striven. There she sat, and the morning passed swiftly away; she took no note of time. She heard the omnibuses roll heavily by the house; she heard the usual clatter of the streets; she heard clocks strike the hour and chime the quarters; but nothing made any distinct impression on her. She noted it all certainly, for she remembered it long afterwards; she could always recall the aspect of the street and of her own drawing-room on that most miserable morning; she could always call back the white glare of the July sun on the opposite houses, and the deep shadows where the sunshine came not, the exact position of chairs and

tables, the very books that lay close at hand; like the setting of a picture, whose vivid colouring and terrible reality haunt our memory, they came ever before her, mere nothings in themselves, but inseparably blended with the pain, the shock, the immeasurable agony of that hour.

She sat quite still, feeling too stunned, too weak to move, or even to think; her tongue was parched, her hands burning with fever, her pulse quick and restless. One, only one idea possessed her; she forgot her antipathy to Robert, her fears of being in any way at his mercy—her sole grief for the time was that Philip had deceived her by carrying on important negotiations of which she was not suffered to be cognizant, that he had outraged her by withholding from her the confidence which, nevertheless, was shared by Estelle Drummond.

One who, in the days of her mortal pilgrimage, knew many a heart-struggle, many a sorrow, and many a pain, wrote:—

> "There are swift hours in life—strong rushing hours,
> That do the work of tempests in their might;
> They shake down things that stood as rocks and towers
> Unto the undoubting mind; they pour in light
> Where it but startles—like a burst of day
> For which the uprooting of an oak makes way;
> They sweep the colouring mists from off our sight;
> They touch with fire thought's graven page, the roll
> Stamped with past years,—and lo! it shrivels as a scroll."

And such an hour was this to Edith Proctor. When at length, weary and dizzy, like one who arouses himself from dream-haunted, unrefreshing slumbers, she rose up to leave that room; she felt as though all things were changed—the shadow cold, dark, and abiding on the home she had brightened so long—Philip lost, her own identity gone. Then she went slowly up-stairs, feeling very tired, thinking of going to her own room that she might still be alone, for she felt unequal to the society even of children and servants. But on the landing she paused. Philip was there, she supposed, and she would not have encountered him or have spoken to him at that moment, for all the gold of California. In the kitchen

Matty was busily preparing dinner. With a dull heavy pain Edith remembered the happy days when she had all the cooking to do herself. In the nursery there were little voices and a sound of baby, cooing in his glee at sister Susy's amateur tumbling; she could not go there, it would be almost as unendurable as the sight of her husband. Whither should she flee? Where, in her own house, could she find refuge from human faces and human voices?

Matty inadvertently decided the matter; she caught a sight of her mistress' dress, and came out to say she had used up all the soap, and if missus were going to the store-room would she see how many jam-pots there were not opened? Yes! the store-room at the top of the house; just the thing; no one would come there, and she could even turn the key in the door and abandon herself to her misery. So she answered—"Yes, Matty, I will go up now; do you want the soap this minute?"

"No, ma'am; presently will do," replied Matty, coming nearer. Edith's voice sounded strange even to her own ears; its harsh, husky, half-broken tones fairly startled Matty; but she said nothing and went back to her cooking, sighing audibly, and shaking her head ominously.

And then Edith went on up the winding stair, and soon came to the quiet store-room, where she locked herself in, and sat down on the floor, rocking herself to and fro, and making an audible moan as though she suffered actual bodily pain. When the tears came she did not know; but they were running in streams down her pale cheeks, and she never thought of wiping them away: it was well she could weep, or the severe tension might have produced disastrous consequences. With those rivers of tears came back the power of thought, of reflection, of consecutive reasoning, and for one quarter of an hour Edith felt that the bitterness was inconceivable, the pain unbearable. Again her moan broke forth —"O! how shall I bear it? how shall I bear it? Philip, whom I loved so well! Never, never did wife more passionately, more deeply, more tenderly love her husband than I Philip—and now, O misery! I love him no

longer! Henceforth we must dwell apart. My soul and Philip's soul can hold communion no longer! O Philip! how could you—how could you hide the truth from me? how could you leave me to hear it from those lips?" And then with unutterable anguish she thought of the pleasant conversation in the counting-house, only yesterday morning. O! how long ago it seemed! it belonged now to that former period of her life, which had broken off so suddenly; and she remembered that even then Philip had been false, heartless, and—O! she could not bear to think what he had been then, and perhaps for a long time—perhaps always; what he was—what he must be to her, henceforth and for evermore.

But the minutes fled, and she knew it was time to go down to dinner. She looked round on her neatly-ordered stores. It was one of her pretty little housewifery prides to have her store-room always free from dust, and most nicely and methodically arranged. Would she ever feel pride in anything again? O Philip! Philip! Then she looked out drearily from the narrow window over the grey leads and the grimy roofs. The very chimneys, with their familiar angles, the oft-seen gables, the Exchange dome dark and clearly defined against the deep blue sky—all were changed, all seemed to belong to the old sweet life that was now a thing of the past.

At last she seemed to be gaining the mastery over herself, and she covered her face with her hands, and tried to pray. But what could she pray for? Only for strength and for patience, for the Philip of old time was as surely lost to her as though he slept the unbroken sleep of death. Once she thought she could have borne it better if he had died before she learned to know him, as she now knew him. Yes! if he had only died when she trusted in him so completely, when she was so proud of him, when his memory would have been so infinitely precious and fair, it would not have been so bitter. Ah! there are deeper sorrows in this world of ours, than those which flow for treasure borne away to a brighter and higher life. To have lost one's best-beloved is sad

indeed; to be left alone on earth is a mournful lot: but Time, the great consoler, softens the anguish; the wound may ache, but the agony is past; and by-and-by come new duties, new cares, and we feel that God is training us for some peculiar work of his own, and that while the daylight lasts we must be content to toil on patiently and even joyfully, till the cool evening-shadows lower around us—the shadows that deepen and deepen, till the night comes—the night that closes over the stillness of the grave; but night, calm, holy, and lustrous with stars—night that soon passes away, because on the mountain-tops rises the dawn of the everlasting day. Yes, the labour of life's long day is over; the evening of repose and the night of death are past and gone; and lo! the morning shineth from the portals of our home, and we are alone no longer—

> "For with the dawn those angel-faces smile,
> That we have loved long since, but lost awhile."

Ah! happy those whose deepest grief is for their beloved, whose faces they may behold no more till the veil of mortality is worn away. Happy, thrice happy ones! for the veil wears thinner day by day—the communion of saints grows fuller and deeper than ever, and every passing day of care, or joy, or grief bears on the hour when hands shall clasp again, and eye meet eye, and soul mingle with soul as they never mingled on earth.

And so Edith felt—as, thinking of Philip, she wrung her hands and cried—"Lost, lost, lost!" Yes, *lost!* and how? —living and lost. Better, by far, dead in Christ; and then not lost, but only gone before. Then she remembered that it must be quite time for dinner, and she must go down and occupy herself once more with the affairs of common life. No, it would not do to neglect any duty. She had enjoyed—in the sense in which people are said to enjoy bad health—for one hour the full luxury of grief in all its abandonment; but now that must cease, and almost sternly she choked back a rising sob, and proceeded to count the preserves and select the pieces of soap that Matty required. As she unlocked the door she

almost smiled to herself, to think how little she had ever anticipated such an hour of misery in that familiar little room. Henceforth those piles of grocery, those shelves, and those beams in the low ceiling would seem to her as so many witnesses of her uncontrolled agony.

When she reached the lower landing, she saw that her own room door was open; Philip was not there, so she ran in, and rapidly made something of a toilet. With more care than usual, she brushed out her bright sunny curls; she bathed her eyes assiduously, and soon succeeded in banishing all but the very faintest traces of weeping, for she was one of those happy people who can cry and not materially disfigure their faces. Then she changed her dress, and put on a fresh collar and clean white sleeves; and altogether she looked very well in her airy muslin and her pretty worked sleeves—one of Isabel's loving gifts after her last London journey. But nothing could change the haggard expression of her worn, white face; she would almost have been tempted to use rouge, had any been at hand, that Philip might not perceive the deadly pallor of her countenance. She had scarcely put on her apron, when she heard Philip calling impatiently to Matty, "Where was her mistress? why did she not go and say that dinner was waiting and cooling on the table?" She ran down hastily, and in another moment found herself in the back sitting-room where they usually dined. She did not look at Philip, or indeed at any one; she took her usual seat, and began to busy herself with the vegetables, as they stood before her—anything rather than meet Philip's eye—yet she must meet it, and that speedily. And all the while her heart made one unuttered moan—"O Philip, Philip!"

And Philip himself? He had not quite slept away his headache, and he was feeling particularly ashamed of himself, and yet extremely annoyed and ill-tempered. "Where have you been hiding yourself?" he asked, crossly; "the dinner is neither hot nor cold, and those peas are half dissolved."

"I was engaged," returned Edith, helping the elder apprentice to the objectionable peas as she spoke. Philip started, his astonishment was uncontrollable—those three little words,

nothing in themselves, spoke volumes; they were quietly, coldly, proudly spoken—they were spoken as Edith had never before spoken to her husband. Was it really Edith sitting there, without one smile, one sunny smile to welcome him to the noonday meal, without one quiet bright glance, one little word of endearment? Had he really so offended her by last night's waywardness? He knew he had been most exasperating, he knew he had taken brandy sufficient to make three temperate men intoxicated—but then Edith was so gentle, so patient, so seldom angry, and so easily won. He knew nothing of Estelle's visit, and he meant after dinner to begin and coax his wife by talking of a short trip to Crosby or Southport for the sake of little Mary's health—just a fortnight of sea breezes to do them all good after the burning dog-days, through which, as Matty said, the Castle-street people were simmering, and grilling, and baking to death. And then he had pleased himself with picturing Edith's delight, and all her pretty thanks, and the sweet kisses she would give him for his consideration; and then he meant to tell her, as judiciously as possible, about the new partnership; and he doubted not that a few loving words would soon reconcile her to what she would certainly dislike; and if she persisted in remaining irreconcilable, he would show, by his cold manner, that he was not pleased, and then she would come round immediately. Edith could never bear his cold tone, his averted glance. Ah! mistaken Philip, little did he dream that his power over Edith was gone. Again he looked at her, and saw that she *would not* look at him. The room was rather shadowy, for the blinds were down, and she sat with her back to the window; but he could perceive her extreme pallor, and the strange expression of her countenance—so quiet, so grave, so stedfast, so nearly stern. A sudden fear smote Philip's heart.

"What have you been doing with yourself all the morning?" he asked presently, when his carving duties were over.

Edith was vainly trying to make a show of eating her dinner with something like appetite—she could scarcely swallow a morsel. She replied, without lifting her eyes from her plate,

"Many things: making a tart, picking fruit, and receiving visitors."

"Indeed! Who have you had this morning? I forgot to say Mrs. Stanton talked of coming to see you this week. Was it she?"

"No; it was Estelle Drummond."

And then Edith did look at Philip, searchingly, unflinchingly; and there was something in the grave, calm gaze of those clear, honest, brown eyes that made his fall in confusion and dismay. He knew it all now: he knew Estelle could have paid her visit but for one purpose. "Confound her!" And Edith already was aware of that which he had intended to impart with so much caution and so much delicacy. He ate his dinner in silence, scarcely knowing what he tasted. It was all one now, whether the roast lamb were spoiled or not; the peas might have been mashed, and the potatoes like boulders, and he would have been none the wiser. He longed impatiently for the meal to be over, that he might begin the necessary explanation. And as he began to arrange his mode of defence, he saw, to his dismay, that there really was very little to say by way of extenuation. He had behaved abominably, and he knew it—and this was his second offence. He remembered now that Edith had begged him, almost warned him, on that former occasion when he had taken the Castle-street premises without consulting her, "never to do it again." He had concluded a most important transaction—an affair that involved not only his own individual welfare, but that of his whole family—an affair that would probably colour and most strongly influence the whole current of their future lives—without taking his wife into counsel. Nay, worse than this, the whole business had been projected, schemed, negotiated, and brought to a close without his having given Edith the slightest intimation of what was going on. The apprentices might suspect something, but Edith was kept in absolute darkness. For one minute Philip put the case thus—"If she had hidden from me everything of importance, how should I feel? If she studiously concealed from me anything that not only touched her own interests,

but mine and the children's, how should I bear it? And really she ought to have been consulted. That wretched Estelle!" And here I beg my readers to excuse a hiatus in Mr. Proctor's soliloquy, for he silently invoked various forcible imprecations on that young lady's head, and such things are better unwritten as well as unspoken. "Yes," he continued presently, "I have been a fool to be beguiled by Edwin and Robert and *that witch*. I wish the days of burning witches were not past: if there ever was a Lancashire witch she is one. She has cast her glamour over me in some way or other. I do wish, though, I had mentioned the thing to Edith; I might have carried the point, however strong her antagonism. To have concluded the business in absolute defiance of her opinion would have hurt her less than this secrecy—this want of confidence; and the secret, too, withheld from her and shared by another woman—the very woman of all others whom she dislikes, and contemns, and avoids. Confusion take her! why did she come here pouring out her tale in my wife's ear? I knew how she would do it, with all the skill and malice of a fiend, making it seem tenfold worse than it really is."

And then Philip began to reflect whether his misdemeanours *could* be made to appear much worse than they really were. Soberly and frankly considering the whole affair, he owned to himself that he had done that which would have sorely tried the meekest wife in existence; it was enough to justify her strongest displeasure, her reproaches, almost her estrangement, and most certainly the loss of her confidence. And now that the signing and sealing were over, he began to fear that he had not done the wisest thing in the world. Edith was a very sensible woman, and she always mistrusted Robert—could she be right? O, if he had not mixed himself up with Edwin's affairs! But now all was over, and a thousand lamentations could not mend the matter; it only remained to make the best of it, and perhaps the best might be exceedingly good. He hoped so, trusted so. And the first thing was to pacify Edith. Philip was undecided between two courses: should he confess his errors

humbly and penitently, and beg his good little Edie to forgive him, and with a tender caress seal his pardon? or should he act with a high hand, telling her he had a right to manage his own business as he pleased, and threatening her with his sternest displeasure if she persisted in her demonstrations of annoyance? He hardly knew which was the better way to proceed. Finally he made up his mind to be guided by her manner to himself.

At last the tedious dinner was over, the table was cleared, and Philip, with a strange sense of misgiving, walked into the drawing-room, saying, as carelessly as he could, "Come this way, Edie, dear; I want to talk with you a little."

And silently she obeyed the summons, closing the door after her, and sitting down on the sofa with her hands quietly folded in her lap. Gravely, nay solemnly, she waited to hear what her husband would say.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOO LATE.

And so the husband and wife at last were alone together to make and to receive explanations.

How heartily Philip wished Edith would say something; he hardly cared what, so that she would break that awful silence. It made him an absolute coward to see her sitting there so grave, so still, so perfectly composed. And there was that in her countenance which puzzled him exceedingly, and filled him with a vague disquiet, which he knew not how to interpret. It was not anger, it was not exactly sorrow, it was not pride—and yet there was something on the pale, quiet, steadfast face that might have been a mingling of all three, a something that bespoke a most sad and undefinable change. Could the Edith who sat now on the sofa, her hands clasped in her lap, her head a little bowed, but her eyes clear, calm,

and searching, be *indeed* the same gentle Edith who had glided last night to her husband's side, and laid her hand so tenderly on his aching brow, and borne his pettishness, his ungraciousness so cheerfully, and ministered so lovingly to his requirements?

At last, finding that she would not take the initiative, he began—"Well, Edie! I suppose Estelle has had the goodness to forestall the communication I intended to make to-day. I suppose you know all I have to tell you?"

"I do know."

"Well?"

"I have nothing to say on the subject; if you will oblige me, you will never refer to it again."

"What do you mean? Do I understand you aright? Do we understand each other? Did Estelle Drummond tell you of the partnership that was completed last night?"

Edith bowed her head. A strange uneasiness crept over Philip as he gazed on her still impassive face; was it anger, or was it sorrow? There were no hasty words, no evidences of displeasure, and there were no tears, no quivering of the lip, no tremulous motion of the interlaced fingers, tokens he would have been quick, and almost satisfied, to discern.

He proceeded—"Well, Edith! it is of no use looking in that way; the thing is done, and cannot be undone. I know you dislike and distrust Robert Anderson, and he knows it too, more's the pity! but you really must allow me to judge of my own business matters. It seemed to me both a wise thing and a right thing to act as I have acted in the affair. My judgment told me that Robert was a steady, sagacious, plodding man of business, and, besides this, he has a few thousands at command, which he will embark in the concern. If I had refused him as a partner, I should probably have had him for a rival. And knowing your ancient prejudices, we all thought it better, and indeed kinder—yes, *kinder*, Edie—to say nothing about it to you, till it was finally arranged. You must see the force of what I say, my dear. How strange you look! Are you dreadfully angry? You naughty little thing, I believe you are in a terrible temper."

And with an effort to pass off the matter playfully, he seated himself by her, and took her in his arms, parting the long curls as they came in his way, and kissing lip and cheek most tenderly. But there were no responding kisses; he felt, ere a moment had passed, that his caresses were tolerated, not reciprocated; and before he could say the playful words that were already on his tongue, she gently, but very firmly, extricated herself from his embrace, and sat upright again.

"*Edith*," said Philip, reproachfully—never, never had she shrunk from his arms before—"Edith, are you so angry that you cannot forgive me?"

"I am not angry now—I was two hours ago—and I forgive you fully, freely, as I trust God forgives me. You have given me cruel, bitter pain; you have inflicted a wound that time itself can hardly heal: but from my heart I forgive you—whatever betides, remember that."

Philip sat like one in a dream: at length he said, "Edith, you are very strange; you take it very seriously."

"Listen, Philip. I suppose it is necessary to speak fully on this subject once. What I have to say I will say now; and never, if I can help it, revert to it any more. You have done what I am convinced is an unwise thing; you have taken a most fatal step: had you consulted me you are right in supposing I should have opposed all my influence—that is, all the influence I thought I had—to the conclusion of this partnership. I am annoyed that the man whom of all others I dislike and distrust should thus be forced, as it were, upon me; for I cannot treat my husband's partner as I could treat an ill-behaved apprentice, or an objectionable assistant. Bare civility now will scarcely suffice, and there will be an equality in all things, an intimacy that can neither be rejected nor shunned. But, Philip, it is not this which has so changed me—changed me, alas! as I never thought to be changed while life lasted: you have been, I know not how long, scheming and arranging this business; you have kept it most sedulously from my knowledge; you have even guarded the secret from Isabel because you knew she would warn me of what was plotting against my comfort and my peace;

but not from Estelle—O, no! Estelle has shared your confidence as she shares Edwin's. Twice have you taken counsel with her, and kept silence with your own wife."

"Edith, Edith, absolutely you are jealous. Why, I should not care if Estelle were drowned in the Mersey to-morrow morning."

A quiet scorn sat for a moment on Edith's features; then she said, "You mistake me, I am not jealous of Estelle; I know all the *heart* you have to give is mine. I know that, as a woman, Estelle is no more to you than any other of her sex: no, indeed, I am not jealous. But you cannot, or will not, understand me. It is the reserve, the distrust you have shown me in this—ay, and in many other matters—that wrongs me. You are not a man of dull perceptions, and you know that you were about to inflict on me the keenest pain. I have hidden no thought from you: I have not confided to Isabel anything, either great or small, that has been withholden from you: I thought we were one in heart; in spite of frequent misgivings I made myself believe in my husband's truth, in his perfect reliance on his wife's affection: but now I find that for long, I know not how long, we have been living separate lives. You knew how great was the wrong you were about to perpetrate: true love could never so have wronged what it cared for most in the world."

"Nay, Edith! you are going too far: I do love you right well, and you know it; only just now you are vexed with me. I will be generous, and confess that perhaps I really do deserve your little queenship's displeasure; but there is reason in all things. You have had your lecture; I own that I have been a bad boy, and there is an end of it. Come, give me a whole batch of kisses, in token of the forgiveness you so solemnly pronounced; and then order an early tea, and we will go across the water this evening, and blow the cobwebs out of our brains. My head aches now most confoundedly, and you are as pale as the white roses yonder; it will do us both good. Come! I am waiting for the kisses! What! why, Edith, you surely do not bear malice!"

"No, indeed, Philip; but I had rather not kiss you,

because—it is best to say what I feel—because I do not love you."

"Upon my word you are exceedingly cool! A pretty thing for an old married woman to say to her husband! You should have thought of that, my dear, when I asked you to be my wife seven years ago! Well! if you do not love me, you have told innumerable untruths, besides acting the hypocrite to perfection."

"Listen! I did love you—I have loved you—O! God knows how much, how dearly! You have been my world—my all in all on earth. To say I would have died for you is to say very little, for what true woman would not die for her best beloved? Yes! you were the most precious thing under heaven; your name was first on my lips when I prayed; I have loved you as God meant wives to love their husbands, second only to Himself."

"You have been a good, loving wife," said Philip, much moved; "and I am sorry this has happened; but why speak so thoroughly in the past tense? Can it be true that you love me no more?"

"It is true! Ah, Philip, I cannot help it. When I heard all this morning from Estelle's lips I thought for a little while I must die, the agony was so great! And then afterwards, when I began to come to myself as it were, I felt that a great and inexplicable change had taken place within me. I thought it would pass away; but it does not. As I ceased to be angry I felt that all the tenderness I used to feel for you was gone; I felt as if the Philip who had been so infinitely dear to me, the Philip I had lived with all these years, lay dead before me; while in his place stood another Philip, to whom I owed duty, reverence, and a certain kind of affection, or regard, or whatever it may be called."

Philip was aghast; it had never occurred to him that Edith *could* be estranged. He saw, he felt that she spoke in sad and sober earnest; it was no mere sentimentalism; the perfect love she had borne him ever since she became his wife had died within her, and, as she drearily said, "she could not help it."

"Not help it, Edith?" he said, presently. "Do you mean that from henceforth I am no more to you than any other person? How long is this estrangement to last?"

"I cannot tell you," she said, wearily; "it should not last an hour if I could make the old affection come back again. But one cannot force one's affections. Though do not think, Philip, I am indifferent to you; you are my husband, and I would not, for all the world contains, be separated from you —I would not for anything that our outer lives should cease to mingle. I suppose I do love you still; but it is so different, so changed! Perhaps the old feelings may come back some day; I cannot tell. I only know that from my own life all the sweetness and brightness and beauty seem suddenly to have departed. And now let us speak about it no more. I cannot bear to appear to reproach you. I will endeavour to please you, as I have ever done; I will obey you, and meet your wishes, only—only—"

"Only you will withhold your heart. You will be a good wife solely because it is your duty. Do you think I can be satisfied with a life so cold, so dreary, so unnatural?"

"You must be satisfied," she said, quietly. "I tell you I will love you as much as I can. After all, the great change is in myself; and if I had not told you of the alteration in my feelings, perhaps you would never have found it out. Let us talk no more about it. Only one thing—I did not note it at the time, but it has recurred since—Estelle said I should not be sorry to leave Castle-street. Is there any probability of my leaving it?"

"Yes," replied Philip, colouring, and his voice faltering in spite of himself; "yes, that was a part of the business which was finally completed last night. It seems some one offered, or rather proposed to Robert, that he should take to a certain old-established publishing firm in London. He had the money, but he felt that he lacked age and weight, and, above all, connection. Besides, he does not care about living in London; and so his plan was, to take to this London business, and carry it out in connection with the business here; he remaining here as sole master, and I, as being the

elder and better-known partner, as principal of the firm in town. You see, the advantages will be manifold: we shall work into each other's hands. Nothing can be better than one partner in London, and another in an important provincial town like Liverpool. Besides, I have long wished to try the London trade. I know my business as well as any man can know it; I love it, I prefer it to any other; but I always felt that as a London publisher alone could I find full scope for my energies, and a worthy field for my talents. I have wished for this, as I thought, vainly, and now the opportunity presents itself, and I should be a fool indeed did I not avail myself of it. Once in every man's life the tide of fortune sets in; it is with him to float boldly on its waves to success and affluence, or to drift back with the ebb-waters to indigence and obscurity." As Philip spoke a new fear smote his wife's heart; or rather, an old, half-acknowledged fear gained sudden strength and terror —was Philip naturally speculative? Was he seized with that dreadful mania of speculation which brings misery to all with whom the speculator is connected—that mania, that is surely a sort of insanity, which makes a man believe that ten pounds will do the work of a hundred, and that every piece of gold he invests will turn out a very mine of auriferous metal? Most fatal delusion; for if the fever of speculation once gain the ascendancy, it will go hard with the sufferer till his life's end, and most hard, and very bitter, to those with whom his interests are identical.

More than once Edith had feared that her husband had a genius for speculation, and she fancied, though she could scarcely tell why, that Robert was constantly trying to fan the latent fire; and now she felt a terrible confirmation of all her fears and suspicions, but she only said, "As you have never consulted me in your affairs, perhaps I ought to say nothing, but I would have you be careful how you involve yourself. I do not speak for myself, it is of my children I am thinking. If at any time you are tempted to great risks, remember you are the father of three children."

"I shall always remember. It is for your sake and for theirs that I wish to make money. Long ago I determined

that one day my wife should be rich and well served; that she should occupy the position she is so well calculated to adorn."

"Happiness has so little to do with riches and position," said Edith, sadly, thinking all the while of those pleasant days in Myrtle-place when she had to put up with countless make-shifts, to do without many things that seemed now absolute necessaries of life, and to use both hand and brain unsparingly for the conduct of her small household. Looking back on those days of thrift and self-denial, her present resources were overflowing—her portion now was comparative wealth. And yet with increased means came ever increased expenses. If the cash-box was heavier, it was opened oftener; if the business was infinitely beyond what it had been in the dear old shop, there were more mouths to feed, there was more clothing to purchase, and certainly more wants than had ever suggested themselves in the past to be supplied now.

And all these thoughts passing rapidly through her mind, she continued:—"Of course rich people and people of a certain station may be, and are, frequently happy; but when too much reliance is placed upon external advantages, I think one is generally disappointed. But about this London scheme: do you really mean that we are to go and live there?"

"Yes, I think so; you will not dislike that?"

"It will be very hard to leave Liverpool, I love the place so well, and I am afraid of London air for the children; but if it must be, I shall not repine. I will try to make the best of it. There are many thousands of mothers living with their little ones in London, and why not I among them?"

"My good little Edie, now you are yourself again."

"No, Philip, not as you mean it. I can go forth now whithersoever you please to take me, because God wills it—because it is my lot, my discipline, and, above all, *my duty*. But I cannot go as once I should have gone with you to the uttermost parts of the earth, feeling that wherever you were must be my home and my chosen place of abode."

"Edith, you torture me by harping on that string. I cannot believe—nay, I will not believe," he added, fiercely, "that

you have ceased to love me: you cannot put me away from your heart."

"You have put me away, Philip, by your want of confidence, your reserve, your absolute concealment of affairs that were as much mine as yours. If I had been a craven, faint-hearted woman—if I had been accustomed to torment you with evil presages and gloomy forebodings, looking myself, and striving to make you look, always on the dark side, then you might have been excused. There are some women whose temper or temperament absolutely excludes them from their husbands' confidence; but I have not been of such—have I, Philip? tell me candidly."

"No, indeed! a better wife never lived, Edie."

"Then why outrage me, by bestowing on others the confidence withheld from myself? Why deliberately put me out of your counsels? Why arrange my future without giving me the opportunity of appeal? But it is vain to ask these questions, and I will ask them no more; only, Philip, it is you who have put me away from you, and I cannot come back again."

"You mean you will not!"

"No, indeed! I think I could die contented this very night, if only I could go back to yesterday morning; if the love for you that was in my heart then could return. But, Philip, you weary me, and I vex you; let us say no more about it. Perhaps some day the cold mists and shadows that have gathered round me will roll away again. God grant it; my heart will be sad and lonely till that time comes. And when shall we leave Liverpool?"

"Some time during the autumn, I suppose; and that reminds me, I am going up to town on Monday, there is so much to arrange."

"Your things shall be in readiness."

With one long wistful glance Philip went away. Had he indeed lost his Edith? Were he and she to be merely good friends, to have a kindly regard for each other, and nothing more? Had all that boundless treasure of a true wife's love floated away from him for ever. Had he wasted the pure,

fervent, undivided affection, that had been his, in all its plenitude and depth, ever since the days of their betrothal? And his heart answered, *Yes*. He sat down in the counting-house, and bowed his head on his hands, in an anguish of spirit such as he had never known since the time when Edith's death was hourly expected.

Ah! to recall the events of the last three months! On the desk before him lay a pile of books newly arrived; and with a heavy sigh he opened the topmost, bethinking himself that it was time to attend to business. The books were Mrs. Hemans' Life and Poems, in seven volumes; and his eye fell at once on these lines:—

"If thou hast crushed a flower,
The root may not be blighted;
If thou hast quenched a lamp,
Once more it may be lighted;
But on thy harp and on thy lute,
The string which thou hast broken
Shall never in sweet sound again
Give to thy touch a token.

If thou hast loosed a bird
Whose voice of song could cheer thee,
Still, still it may be won
From the skies to warble near thee;
But if upon the troubled sea
Thou hast thrown a gem unheeded,
Hope not that wind or wave will bring
The treasure back when needed.

If thou hast bruised a vine,
The summer's breath is healing,
And its clusters yet may glow,
Through the leaves their bloom revealing;
But if thou hast a cup o'erthrown
With a bright draught filled—O! never
Shall earth give back that lavished wealth
To cool thy parched lips' fever.

The heart is like that cup,
If thou waste the love it bore thee;
And like that jewel gone,
Which the deep will not restore thee;
And like that string of harp or lute
Whence the sweet sound is scattered:
Gently, O! gently touch the chords,
Too soon for ever shattered."

And again Philip bowed his head, and murmured to himself —"Too true!—but too late! too late! I have wasted the love of the tenderest, noblest, purest heart that ever throbbed in woman's bosom."

CHAPTER XXII.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

THE summer tints were fading, and the days were shortening rapidly, when the time came for Edith to make the final arrangements for her removal to the mighty metropolis, which hitherto she had never visited. And meanwhile she walked the busy streets of Liverpool like one who is leaving for ever his native land: and the pain of the exile was at her heart as she gazed on familiar buildings and went her accustomed ways, and, above all, when she entered the beloved sanctuary that had been her spiritual home so long. Ah! week after week was gliding away, and soon it would be the last Sunday and the last service, and she would pass that well-known threshold, to repass it perhaps nevermore! She was growing very thin, and she was paler than ever, while all the sweet sunshine of her fair expressive face had died away, leaving in its stead a calm serenity, mingled with a grave sadness, that made all her friends wonder what could have befallen her; and yet, with her lovely bloom and brightness all vanished, Philip thought she had never been so beautiful.

Presently came the question of servants. Jane would certainly leave; Edith had no wish to take her so far from her home, and the girl herself, born and bred on the shores of the Mersey, had no inclination to change them for the banks of Father Thames. But regarding Matty, it was a serious consideration; to lose her would be to lose a treasure, whose value was only half suspected, when there was a chance of her being missed out of their family circle. And Matty

herself loved her master and mistress—though she showed her love for her master rather oddly at times, for Matty was a young woman of acute perceptions, and she sometimes thought he might be more considerate towards his wife and more affectionate to little Mary; and any slight on her darling, any hastiness to her mistress, was sure to be resented in Matty's own peculiar style. She never conversed with Jane, but she talked to her saucepans, and to the fire-irons, making little remarks in anything but a *sotto voce* style; and one day Philip, who was just coming out of a temper, heard her.

"I'd teach him!" she exclaimed, rubbing the kitchen poker till it shone like silver. "I only wish I could be his wife for one month—only one month. Ah, my! wouldn't he pray for the first proximo, as he calls it, to come! He shouldn't have no peace of his life; I'd worrit him all day, and I'd nag at him all night; I wouldn't give him no rest, no! not on Sundays! I'd serve him out—a great big six-foot lord of the creation as he thinks himself! He'd know by that time what a good wife was!" And Matty scrubbed the poker as if that were her offending master, to whom she was administering salutary discipline. And Philip, who had listened to the entire soliloquy in profound ignorance of his identity with her personal pronoun masculine, never imagined that it was himself whom Matty wished to treat to entirely new conjugal experiences; and he went away, laughing and pitying Matty's "young man," who had certainly caught a Tartar rather than a sweetheart.

Matty had come into Edith's service a rough, awkward, ignorant girl. She was now a very well-behaved young woman, neat in her person, quick and thorough in her work, and almost more than her mistress's rival in the noble culinary art. Besides, her master and mistress both knew that all they had was safe in her hands; she was as true as gold, and their interests, whether large or small, were studied as carefully as if they had been her own. It would indeed be a sad dispensation which deprived them of Matty's services. And yet that she would accompany them to London seemed highly improbable; for during the summer she had engaged

herself to a respectable young man, who was employed in one of the newspaper printing-offices of the town.

So one afternoon, when Edith was alone, she called in Matty; for she thought it high time to begin to settle matters definitively. "Of course you know we are leaving Liverpool in a very short time, Matty?" began Mrs. Proctor. "I want to know what plans you are making on your own account. From what you told me the other day, I conclude there will not be much chance of your getting married at present; so I suppose you will wish another service. Of course, Matty, I shall do all in my power to help you. I can give you the very best of characters. You have been a good, faithful servant to me, and I hope you will be happy and prosperous wherever Providence may place you."

Matty looked stolid, and was silent; yet some unusual emotion was evidently stirring within her.

Edith continued :—"Mrs. Stanton wants a cook. I have but to mention your name, and she will be delighted to engage you."

Then Matty fairly burst forth, weeping and vociferating, "What have I done, O! what have I done, that you won't take me with you, missis? Have I angered the master? I know I do let out a bit of sauciness *sometimes*."

"I should only be too glad to take you with me, Matty; but I never imagined you would consent to leave Liverpool. Besides, what will John Fraser say?"

"If John Fraser has any sense, he'll think all the better of me for sticking to them as have been my best friends. What was I when you first come a bride to the old house in Myrtle-place? Why, a big, awkward, ignorant girl, without any brains, with thumbs instead of fingers, and with everything that was clumsy and provoking about me, and nothing that was good and serviceable. I was scarcely worth my keep, leave alone my wages, when I was first hired by the master as a servant-of-all-work. A pretty servant-of-all-work, indeed, that didn't understand any sort of work, except it was scouring! Yes, I always could scour well; my mother taught me that. I had strong arms, and I listened

to her, and says she to me, 'Now, Matty, when you scrub a floor, scrub well all the corners and the sides of the room, and don't mind so much about the middle of it.' That was queer, I thought; but I soon saw the sense of it; for you're sure to take care and have the middle of the floor clean, because everybody can see it right away; and if it isn't as it ought to be, it stares you in the face at once, as one might say; but the corners and the out-of-the-way parts can be just dabbed over, and no one be the wiser, if they don't go peering into them. So I've thought of my mother's caution ever since, and scrubbed hardest where folks see least. And she's quite right; the middle is sure to look well, somehow."

"Yes, Matty, you always did scour well. You have made the boards even here look white and wholesome. But about going to London, do you really wish it?"

"Wish it, ma'am? O dear! I'd walk there, rather than let you go without me. Why, if you hadn't me, you would always have darling Miss Mary on your hands; I am the only one you ever trust her with. I know how she ought to be held and carried, for I've carried her all along, and I've got the knack of it, pretty nigh as well as you have, ma'am. And then you've taught me all your ways; I know the master's ways, and I know his taste, and how he likes his dinner cooked. And, O dear, ma'am! though it's I that say it, that shouldn't ought to say it, I'm sure you couldn't do without me in a strange place, and among strange people. If I'm good for anything, it's you that have done it; and it's only fair, if you have had all the plague of me, you should have some of the profit, ma'am. So, if you please, I'll go to London."

"But, Matty, I think you ought to consider John Fraser; perhaps he will object to your going away."

"I don't think he will, for we've no thought of getting married yet awhiles. I mind the tract you gave me a year agone—'Before you marry, make sure of a house wherein to tarry.' And John's prudent-like, and we both want to save a bit of money, and he looks to get promoted; and he can write once now and then, and so can I; and I should like to

see a bit more of life before I settle down to keep my own house, and be tied for ever by the leg, as one may say—working-men's wives generally is. It's a fine thing, I suppose, to see London, and it makes you of consequence after, though I dare say we shall all find it shocking enough to live there the whole year round."

"I do not much like the idea of it, Matty; I am especially anxious about the children; but still I hope we shall not find anything really shocking. Some one has been describing London life to you in not very attractive colours."

"Ah!" said Matty, shaking her head, and speaking sententiously, "I know, ma'am; many and many's the times I've heard about Londoners and their ways. Why, they tell me all the milk is chalk and water and calves' brains, and the bread has bones ground up in it, and everybody's house is on fire once in the twelvemonths at least."

"Not so bad as that, Matty. There are many fires in London certainly; but then it is a very large place—infinitely larger than Liverpool. We must look out for an honest baker if we cannot bake at home, and I dare say we shall find one. As for the milk, perhaps it may be watered too much, but we must do the best we can."

"Then, ma'am, I may count upon going with you?"

"Yes, if you are quite sure that you wish it. But you shall not decide now. Think it well over, Matty, and take counsel with John Fraser, and, above all, pray that you may be guided. Ask God to show you which is your path of duty—and then, Matty, come to me on Saturday evening, and tell me your resolve."

And on Saturday evening Matty did come, and declared that nothing should separate her from her mistress as long as she remained single. And John, too, thought she ought not to desert them as had been the making of her; and he was willing to let her go, while he stopped in Liverpool, and got together something of a home; and maybe, when all was ready, he would come and fetch her, for he too thought it would be a grand thing to say he had been in London, and seen St. Paul's Cathedral, and Westminster Abbey, and the

Tower, where they cut off people's heads, and Smithfield, where they used to burn people alive. John Fraser, you perceive, read a little history, and was, moreover, bent on improving his mind, and one of his parting injunctions to Matty was to be sure and read the History of England right through from the beginning to the end, else she would never rightly understand London. So it was settled that Matty should quit the shores of her own salt, breezy Mersey, for the far-away metropolis, on the banks of the Thames of unsavory reputation.

Of course they were all very busy; many things were to be sold; some Robert Anderson would take to, for he was going to be married to a young lady at Egremont; and then there was a tremendous packing-up, and, worst of all, there were many valedictory visits to be paid.

Many of these Edith paid alone; and at length the day came when she must go to West Derby, to say good-bye to Isabel; and this time she herself arranged, so as to be at Redcliffe House in the absence of Miss Drummond. Again Isabel sent the carriage; but this time little Mary was not her companion, and gravely and pensively she rode along the familiar road, noting the dusty, faded aspect of the hedgerows, and the autumn tints on the trees. How much had passed since that pleasant afternoon when she had listened to the prattle of her little daughter, when those very trees in the Tue-brook meadows, now yellow and brown, and sere and thinned of foliage, had spread out their leafy shade in the full perfection of estival beauty! Sadly Edith mused as she passed along; she felt as though everything in the world were changed; the sunshine of her life had paled and sickened; the rose-tints had faded away; a gray, joyless world lay around her, and in it moved two gray shadows—herself and Philip. And looking back at her old self, she pitied herself, as though it had indeed been another woman, who was so proud of being Philip Proctor's wife, so loving, so tender, and so true.

And now the pangs of parting were beginning to make themselves felt. Edith scarcely knew how bitter it would be

to say good-bye to Liverpool till the actual adieux were commenced; but then she could bear any pain now. She had borne that intolerable agony three months before; she had endured that supreme misery of Estelle's visit, and now she could bear anything and everything; or at least she thought so. Her present pain was what toothache is to a person who has known the excruciating torments of tic-doloreux; a dull, sad, continuous sense of sorrow, and, every now and then, a gush of bitter, almost anguished emotion.

Isabel received her with streaming eyes and open arms. "O, Edith!" she cried, when they were fairly shut up together in that sanctum, Isabel's boudoir—"O! my dear, best friend! is it really true? are you really come to say good-bye? O! Edie, Edie! when you are gone my good angel will go; you don't know what you have kept me from; you don't know what your influence has been. Often and often I should have done something desperate but for your gentle words and kindly looks; and now—"

"Take courage, dear Isabel! If you would but trust in God—if you would but pour out your heart to Him! Ah! what could one do in this sorrowful, changing world, were it not for God's love and mercy; for the certainty that all is ordered, all right, all for the best; for the hope of the rest and the joy that will surely come at last?"

"Edie! do you know that you look as if that rest would be welcome? The summer sunshine and the sunshine of your smiles seem to have departed together. You are not your own old self. Ah, this leaving Liverpool, I know, is a sore trial for you. Don't cry, darling; I can't bear to see tears on your face, that used to be so calm always, if not sunny; and then this detestable partnership! Ah! that wretched Estelle! it is her doing, I know; I am certain she originated that scheme—she put it into Edwin's head. She can put anything there she chooses."

Isabel did not know the whole history: Edith was mute as the grave on the subject of her estrangement from Philip. She never complained of him, and Isabel little guessed the depths and the darkness through which her friend's soul had

passed, and was still from time to time sorrowfully though patiently passing. But she said now, with a bitterness which Mrs. Haughton had never heard from her before, "Do not let us speak of Estelle; her very name troubles me."

"Edith!" said Isabel, sadly, "has she troubled your peace too? Has she stepped in between you and him who seemed of one heart and soul? Must she make your home desolate as mine is?"

Edith made no answer; she felt that heart and home were both desolate now. Estelle Drummond had stolen in like the serpent in Eden—like a blight on a fair and sunshiny summer-land, where its presence withers bud and flower and verdure, blossom and fruit.

"I see! I see!" said Isabel, mournfully; "it is as I feared: the plague-spot has spread! O! I cannot, cannot forgive her! And at this very moment she has another poor simpleton in her toils. O! if she would but be human for once! She will torture that poor creature to death ere she has done with him."

"Who? to whom do you refer? Surely you do not mean Robert, and he on the eve of marriage to Miss Mackintosh?"

"O, no! though his being on the eve of marriage would weigh very little in Estelle's estimation if she were determined on his subjugation. Married or single, free or betrothed, it is all one to her; but this time her victim is unmarried and disengaged. He is smitten with her beauty, taken captive by her powers of fascination, and he fairly grovels at her feet; she is fooling him to the top of his bent; she will make him her slave, and then laugh at him, and turn away in unconcealed disdain."

"Cruel! wicked! unwomanly!" cried Edith, passionately; "can nothing be done; cannot you warn this man?"

"No, he would not believe me: what chance have I against Estelle's witcheries? One glance of hers would unsay all that I have said. No; if men will be fooled by a lovely face and a silvery voice let them suffer, let them be tortured, let them die!"

"Hush, Isabel, dear, you do not mean all that. But

who is this unfortunate now under the spells of Miss Drummond?"

"O, a mere nobody—a poor consumptive creature, thin and wasted and shrunken, without much intellect, and, I should say, without much education. What crimes he has committed I do not know, but heavy ones, I should think, that Providence permits him to fall into *her* toils. She literally despises him; she lures him on to speak out of the fulness of his heart, and then she mocks him: it is all one with her: the highest genius, the most perfect culture, the purest refinement—equally with the weakest intellect, the merest frivolity, or the most uncultured ignorance—must yield to her influence and acknowledge her sway. It is a greed of power and of admiration as insatiate as it is culpable, that makes her the dangerous person she is. All prey, whether noble or ignoble, is alike to her."

Edith sighed deeply, and was silent: she was wishing—O, how earnestly—that Estelle had let Philip alone: for, though she had done him less harm than some others, she had wrought a fearful, and perhaps irremediable evil. Edith knew well that, though she had seduced Philip's judgment and overpowered his will, she had never touched his heart: and even the admiration that seemed wrung from him, by what he called her "*glamourie*," was strangely mingled with aversion and defiance. No, Edith never distrusted her husband's entire fidelity: her quarrel with him, so to speak, was not because he cared for Estelle, but because he had cared so little for herself as to expose her to cruel insult, by sharing with another the confidence that ought to have been hers, and hers alone.

"We will speak no more of Estelle," said Isabel, at length: "this is our last conversation, for I know not how long a time, and I had hundreds of things to say, only I have forgotten them."

"Never mind, write them;—and you will come and see me in London? Though, I warn you, I shall be worse off than in Castle-street; the place of business is in the heart of the City, in the publishing quarter; not exactly

in the 'Row,' I believe, but under the very shadow of St. Paul's. And, connected with the premises, is a dwelling-house, that Philip thinks for the present it would be wise to inhabit; there is nothing like being on the spot, he says, especially at first. If things prosper we shall live a little way out, I suppose, after a while. But such as I have, Isabel, is freely yours; come when you will, or how you will, you are sure of a welcome—only I cannot fancy you, the denizen of this luxurious retreat, finding yourself at home in a dingy London parlour, minus every elegance and every luxury, as mine will be."

"Edith!" cried Isabel, almost solemnly, "you do not understand me then: I would relinquish every luxury, every refinement, almost every comfort, if I only could be a happy woman—a happy wife—such a wife as I foolishly fancied I should be, when I stood at the altar, nearly six years ago. If my husband loved me truly and solely, and I loved him, as I once thought we should, I would willingly exchange Redcliffe House—ay, and its splendour ten times multiplied—for some humble cottage, or humble lodging, where I had to work with my hands like a common servant. It is kindness I want—sympathy, confidence, love—the love that is my due. To win *that* I would give up everything else."

Edith could only squeeze Isabel's hand, and be silent; her heart was too full to speak. But they lingered together till quite late, and Isabel's last words to her friend were, "Edie, tell me again, that, 'come how I will, and when I will,' I shall be welcome under your roof."

And Edith fervently repeated her words as the carriage moved on down the drive. Turning through the gate she saw Isabel once more, at the hall-door, the lamplight shining full on her face and dress. Never again would they meet within the precincts of Redcliffe House!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CHAPTER OF FAREWELLS.

SWIFTLY, all too swiftly, the busy days passed away, and it came to the last week of the Proctors' residence in Castle-street. Edith took innumerable farewells, of which no one, however, was cognizant but herself; the familiar streets, the houses, the churches—all were as so many dear friends from whom she was on the eve of a separation that might endure through all time; and to some places she paid special and solitary visits, mutely bidding them good-bye, and turning back again and again for one last gaze, one final look that should impress itself on her memory, and remain there distinct and vivid, when the well-beloved Mersey shore should be to her only as a fair fleeting vision of the past.

One day, after an early dinner, she put on her bonnet and went out, telling Philip, as she passed through the shop, not to wait tea for her, for she was going across the water, and might be late. It was a splendid day; the sky was cloudless, and the domes and spires of the fair city were bathed in brilliant sunlight. The clear atmosphere, the genial temperature, the throng of masts, and the fluttering flags made the whole picture intensely Venetian in its characteristics. Never, never had Liverpool worn so queen-like, so gracious an aspect in Edith's partial eyes, as now that she was beholding it for the last time; and her eyes filled with tears as, seated on the deck of the New Brighton ferry-boat, she gazed on the shining river—for it was almost high water, and the tides were at the spring, and the great waves came tumbling in from the sea, lifting up their sparkling crests to the vivid sunshine, and breaking against the piers and the little low, rocky headlands on the Cheshire shore in showers of light and beauty. And in the clear golden air rose up the masses of buildings on

either bank, and the forest of tall masts that lined the shore for miles; and on the broad river itself were many gallant ships with their white wing-like sails swelling in the soft fresh breeze, and their pennons waving proudly against that deep blue, stainless sky. All was fair and lovely, and Edith sat contemplating the whole scene, feeling that it would be photographed on the tablets of a most faithful memory, for many and many a year, if it should please God to prolong her life to middle or to old age.

The brief voyage was soon over, and the little steamer threw out its plank on the New Brighton pier. Edith had never been there by herself before: always hitherto Philip had been by her side to aid her in landing. What a thing of the past, and yet how intensely present, that old life of hers seemed to be, as she took the familiar path that led down to the lighthouse and the sands! Already the afternoon was waning, and the loiterers on the shore, both pedestrians and equestrians, were slowly wending their way homewards, or back to the pier, where the boats were running half-hourly to Liverpool; and presently Edith was alone on the wide, solitary sands, and she could ramble about at pleasure, and muse and gaze all uninterruptedly on the deep blue sea, flushing now almost to purple beneath the intense azure of the skies, and on the low red rocks with their tide-worn caves, and on all around, and beyond, and near—for all were remembrances of that happy Christmas Day when she walked that wave-washed shore by Philip's side, her arm resting on his, and her heart resting in him with such a sense of peaceful, full content—such a deep, calm, settled happiness. Ah! looking back on those days was like looking into a newly-opened grave, where one's best beloved is hidden for ever from mortal sight. And as Edith paced those quiet sands, stooping now and then for a piece of sea-weed to be carried away as a precious memento, she was re-echoing those words of Philip, spoken so lightly, so thoughtlessly, on that last happy morning in the counting-house—"*Ay de mi! Ay de mi!*"

Then she came back to the rock, and stood there awhile, looking at its deep fringes of brown weed and its shell-

encrusted sides, till the sun sank below the western waves, and the waters flushed and burned in the sunset splendour, and the roseate mist-like clouds of evening wreathed themselves in all fair and floating forms, high in the sapphire zenith. And softly from the far distance came the music of church bells, now dying, now swelling over the restless river, just as it had done on that day of days when she first called Philip husband. And then it was time to go home, for the twilight was rapidly closing in, and with one last lingering gaze that swept the dim, deserted shore, Edith turned towards the pier to take the home-bound boat. She had never before been alone on the river at night; but she felt no fear, and with an aching heart she watched the receding light on the Black Rock, as it paled like a star of dawn in the distance. Ere long the lamps of the landing-stage were flashing around her; but there was some little delay in landing, and for several minutes Edith sat quite still on deck, gazing out seawards through the darkness, and heeding not at all the troubled waves around her, nor her fellow-passengers, nor even the throngs of people crowding as usual on the floating pier, for embarkation or from debarkation, or to meet their friends from the Cheshire side. There was one who, under cover of the darkness, stood quite still, contemplating Edith's sad, dreamy face; he had divined whither she was going, and he came down to meet the half-past five boat, thinking she would surely return then, as she had not made her appearance before. He too remembered—O! how vividly—that happy Christmas Day on the wintry New Brighton shore; he too could recall the aspect of the sands, and the rock, and the pleasant sound of the "merry, merry bells of Yule." And now gazing on the quiet, grave face, looking out over the deep, dark waters, as the lamplight revealed its sweet, serious, and yet so sad—almost hopeless—expression, he started to think how great was the change. He remembered the girlish countenance of his young bride, so blooming, so bright, so trusting, and so tender; and later still—ah! much later, for his thoughts now touched a period that had only just lapsed into the irrevocable past—he saw the same dear face whence

the youthful bloom had faded; but still—though rather grave, and sometimes rather care-laden—still the same sweet face beaming forth lovely smiles, and loving glances, and generally so calm, and so radiant with a hope and peace that Philip knew full well came not from any terrestrial source. And now! those same features, so pensive, so cold, so stern, as Philip read their settled expression: the change was terrible! And yet the more he pondered it, the less he marvelled, for he knew he had indeed outraged most fearfully the faithful heart and the tender spirit that had been, so far as he permitted it, one with his heart, and one with his spirit, ever since the day he had called her his own. If she would but be angry! but no; the brief displeasure was long ago past, and nothing seemed to disturb her equanimity. She was gentle as ever, scrupulously attentive to his wants, even to his wishes, obedient almost to a fault, and unremitting in her maternal and in her household duties. "The only difference is," thought Philip, with a bitter sigh, "that she loves me no longer. She may regard me kindly—she would make any sacrifice for me; her true woman's heart would make her do that; but all the tenderness is gone, and all the esteem."

But now the plank was thrown out, and with the same grave composure with which she had sat through the interval of delay, she rose and crossed the little gangway to the stage, within a yard of the place where Philip was waiting. She lifted her eyes, as if some instinct told her that he was there, and saw him close to her; but she expressed no surprise; only thanking him for coming down to meet the boat, she took his proffered arm, and walked silently towards the quay. He did not ask her where she had been—indeed there was no need to do so, especially as he had seen the words "New Brighton" legibly painted above the steamer's deck, and without this he had known in some mysterious way whither her steps were tending when she left her own house. Without a word, the wedded pair passed over the drawbridge and the quay, and up St. James's-street to St. George's-crescent, and so on to their own habitation.

Tea was still waiting; that is, the table was set for three, for the children were already in bed; and Edith, turning to her husband, said, "I am sorry you waited; I would have hastened home had I known I was keeping you from your tea. I particularly told Matty to prepare everything at the usual hour, and call you, whether I had returned or not. Did she not do as I told her?"

"Yes, yes, Matty is not in fault: she rang the tea-bell exactly as the Exchange clock struck five; but I did not care to sit down without you, so I told her to take the tea-pot into the nursery and have her own tea with Jane and the children. I don't like tea that is not of your making."

Meanwhile Edith was measuring out the shellsful of tea, and, by divers little touches, giving the table that undefinable air of comfort and good taste which Matty's most painstaking efforts always failed to produce; and Philip was watching her almost covertly, as if he had been her lover, rather than her husband, when she looked up, and their eyes suddenly met. There was so much quiet sadness, so much self-reproach in Philip's earnest gaze, that her own involuntarily fell, and she felt the tears rising fast, and beading the long lashes, as they lay on her pale, thin cheek. She felt that from her heart of hearts she forgave him all the anguish he had inflicted, and it gave her a deep, thrilling pain to see the look of sorrow on his brow; but she could not go to him as once she would have done—she could not fold her arms round him, and whisper the words of love and trust restored, that she knew he was yearning to hear. And yet, had they continued alone together just then, some words might have been spoken, which would have convinced Philip that his wife's alienation was by no means so complete as he believed. Edith, had she raised her eyes again, could never have withstood that mute entreaty—that she would come to his side, and be to him again all she had ever been during the happy years of their wedded life; had she met that sorrowful gaze once more, her heart must have melted, and she must have rushed into his arms, and told him that the coldness was going—was gone; that she would love him again, with the old, deep, tender,

steadfast love, whose preciousness he had never truly estimated, till now that he feared it was lost to him for ever.

But ere a word could be uttered, ere a second glance could be exchanged, footsteps were heard on the top of the stairs, and immediately afterwards Robert Anderson came in and took his seat at the table, and Edith silently occupied herself in filling the cups before her.

The next afternoon she had another pilgrimage to accomplish, and that to Myrtle-place, that she might bid good-bye to the dear old house where she had passed so many happy hours. There it was; little altered in appearance since she first knew it and rejoiced to call it home; and, that she might see more than the mere outside walls, she went into the shop and asked for a packet of envelopes, for the stationery business was still carried on; and there were the familiar shelves, and the old counter, and even the case where the fancy goods, which were then under her special care, used to be arranged. The sitting-room door was open, and Edith could look in and see the familiar hearth, and the cupboard in the recess; and it seemed but as yesterday when she sat there by the fire nursing her first-born child, or waiting tea for Philip, or pretending to read, while she watched him through the half glass door. What a palace of content had that humble sitting-room behind the shop been to her in the old time; and, unless she were greatly deceived, to Philip also; for, though ambition had always more or less marred his pleasures, he had once been supremely happy in calling her his own, and in bringing her—poor desolate waif and stray on the great world's shore, as she once felt herself—to this quiet, pleasant home, where she was sheltered from all the rough blasts and buffets that had gathered round her defenceless head ever since the days of her early girlhood.

"Farewell! happy home of my happiest days!" she said to herself, as she took up her change and prepared to depart. She looked again wistfully through the open door; she would have liked dearly to enter; to go into the little kitchen, where, proud as a queen, she had cooked Philip's dinners and her own; to ascend the stairs, to see again the drawing-room

where Philip used to say she fostered the pomps and vanities of the world—ah! such humble pomps, such innocent vanities! —to give one glance round her own old chamber, where she had lain so long between life and death. But it might not be; and again her heart cried, "Farewell! farewell! my once happy home. Sacred to the memory thou ever wilt be—sacred for thy joys, sacred for countless blessings. Farewell!"

And, with a rapid step, she walked back to Castle-street, scarcely daring to trust herself to any further reminiscences of those days which the sight of Myrtle-place had revived with unwonted force and vivid minuteness. She was glad to busy herself with the packing, which seemed to be a standing occupation for everybody, and quite thankful to listen to Matty's garrulous anticipations of London fires, and London dairies.

But the hardest ordeal was yet to come: all old friends had been visited, and Miss Wilson had said good-bye, for she was suddenly called away into Yorkshire, yet the worst remained to be endured. Edith never knew till it came to the last Sunday how dearly she loved her excellent pastor, and the church over which he presided. It was the first Sunday in November, consequently the Ordinance Sabbath—just five years since she had turned away with such heartfelt sorrow from the table of the Lord, and turned away, too, with such trembling fears, that never again might be addressed to her the blessed words of invitation and entreaty. And it was just such another calm, golden day, sunny, and mellow, and still, and clad in the sad and touching beauty that sometimes glorifies the last relics of the dying autumn; and it made Edith think deeply of that fair Sunday that had been numbered with things of the past for five years.

And now Edith staid with the people of the Lord, who were to commemorate His dying love, and anew pledge themselves to a life of holiness and earnest labour in His service; but Philip was still with those who refused to sit down to the Master's Feast, and sometimes it seemed as if he were farther from the kingdom of God than when years before he had shown so much displeasure and annoyance at his wife's public profession of faith. He still admired Mr. Stanton's sermons; he still

made a point of occupying his place in his own pew once on the Sabbath-day; he still gave liberally "to the cause;" and he was still a rigid and uncompromising Nonconformist: but more than ever was his heart hardened against the living truths of the everlasting Gospel, and more than ever he turned a deaf ear to every appeal that sought to win him from the ranks of a lost and thoughtless world to the service of the Eternal King, under whose glorious banners are peace and safety, and joys unspeakable.

And meanwhile Edith joined with her fellow-members in partaking once more of the bread and the wine that were the visible symbols of the broken body and the blood outpoured on Calvary long centuries ago; and sweet was that communion of one small section of the Church Militant here on earth, met to mingle prayer and praise, and to keep the Feast, in memory of their once crucified, and now exalted, Head. It might be that nevermore would Edith be gathered again with that familiar circle around that board—nevermore might she hear the pastor's voice, saying, "Drink ye all of it." What then? There would come a time when, all the waves and storms of this mortal life for ever past, the broken and scattered circle of true worshippers would be re-united, where the new wine should be poured out in the Father's kingdom.

The evening service came; and then indeed Edith felt it was for the last time. With many a tear she joined in the prayers, but she could not raise her voice to mingle in the hymn. And with earnest attention she listened to the sermon, wishing she could only remember every word of it, and wondering, in spite of herself, whether in the time to come she might ever sit within those walls, and hear those familiar tones again. The sermon was full of consolation and encouragement, and Edith half believed her pastor was thinking of her; especially when he spoke of the partings and farewells that are our portion in this world, and of the restorations and re-unions of the blessed life to come. But it was over at last; the little Bible that Mr. Stanton always held in his hand in the pulpit, was closed, the final hymn was sung, the benediction given, and the two thousand worshippers who had heard

once more the Gospel-message rose up to depart and to disperse. Edith lingered almost to the last, and when she reached the door, more than half the lights were already extinguished. She looked back up the dim aisle her feet had so often trodden; she cast one lingering glance on the pulpit where for so many years had been preached to her the whole Gospel of God—on the place where Sabbath by Sabbath she had joined in the services of the sanctuary, and on the other spot beyond, where, on the profession of her faith in Christ, the waters of baptism had closed over her head. And with the pang of separation came a throb of exceeding joy, as she remembered that nothing could divide her from the Living Head of the Holy Universal Church, of which this well-beloved church was only a unit among many thousands of sections. It was sweet to think of the Holy Catholic Church—the one Church—the only Church that will endure when all controversies are silent, all parties broken up, all sects for ever vanished.

And, thanking God for all the blessings enjoyed in that beloved sanctuary, and praying earnestly that on pastor and people might be poured out fullest and richest measures of grace Divine, Edith took her way homeward through the crowded streets. Philip had staid at home, but that evening he came to meet her, and just where Bold-street and Church-street join they encountered one another. He was very silent; for, after all, he was feeling the separation from his native town, from old friends, and from familiar haunts, more keenly than any one supposed. And Edith's heart was too full, and her own thoughts were too deep, and her emotions too strong to be clothed in words. Once only the silence was broken, as they were slowly walking up the quieter side of Lord-street; and Philip said—"You are tired, Edith; it has been a trying day for you."

"Not much tired, thank you," she replied; "it was very kind of you to come to meet me."

"*Kind!*" he said, sadly; "I feel something more than *kindness* for you, Edith. I can be kind to Miss Wilson, to Matty—but to you—"

"Hush!" she cried, imploringly; "do not speak of that again, I beseech you."

Her tone, more than her words, wounded him to the heart, and he spoke no more. But Edith, when she knelt an hour afterwards at her own bedside, felt a pang of remorse—might she not be sinning against her husband, and so against her God?

CHAPTER XXIV.

EDITH'S TEA-SERVICE.

The evening had closed in when Philip and Edith and the weary children found themselves at the Euston-square Terminus. Matty, with her arms tenaciously clasped round baby, was fast asleep; Philip, with little Susy in his lap, was drowsily nodding; and Edith, wide awake, was trying to cheer up poor little Mary, to whom the long fatiguing journey had indeed been a most serious undertaking,—when the train slackened speed. Empty carriages, and engines that seemed to have retired into private life, loomed in the distance through the dim lamplight, and in the midst of a labyrinth of rails; red lights and blue lights were multiplied here, there, and everywhere; and officials, with signal lanterns, gave notice that the good train was at last nearing the destined point towards which it had been noisily, and ploddingly, and, for a train, somewhat slowly moving on for many long wearisome hours.

At last, however, there was a perfect cessation of motion; porters ran up and down, calling out something which was meant for "Euston-square," and doors were unlocked, and the luggage van began to be rifled, and Philip waked up with a yawn and told Edith and Matty to be on the look-out, for they were "there." And Matty immediately put her head out of the window to see what London was like.

And, after a sweeping glance up and down the platform, said she "didn't think much of it."

It took some little time to gather together all the packages and parcels belonging to the party, but at length, thanks to Philip's energy and determination, and Matty's grim co-operation, everything was heaped up on one truck, and brought to the carriage where Edith and the children were already seated. A few minutes more and they were clear of the terminus, and were really driving through the streets of London; and Matty, seeing so many people about, at once decided that it must be market-day, or most likely the fair. And she looked keenly at the shop windows and at the pedestrians, striving to get a general impression of the scene, which might be recorded in her first letter for John Fraser's especial benefit.

When they reached Holborn, they came to a dead lock, and there for some minutes they were obliged to wait till the crowd of vehicles in van and rear contrived to disentangle themselves, and move on to their several destinations. And Matty felt this was being in London indeed; such a situation was imposing in the extreme. But a few minutes afterwards other and less pleasurable feelings were evoked; in an open space, where several large thoroughfares converged, stood a very singular machine, which Edith herself innocently supposed to be a mammoth telescope, on new principles, set up for the laudable purpose of teaching astronomy to the million! Philip, however, soon corrected the error, and poor Matty looked shudderingly at the first "fire-escape" she had ever seen, fully convinced that to be burnt to death, or to make use of the fearful apparatus before her, was the alternative and the inevitable lot of everybody who tempted Providence by coming to live in London; and therewith she began to speculate upon the length of time that *might* elapse before Mr. Proctor and his family were burnt out of house and home. It was a comfort to see some houses wearing an unmistakeable air of antiquity, for they could not have been burnt down recently; and there were actually some that might, from their appearance, have been standing, untouched

by the devouring flames, for upwards of a century. Might not Mr. Proctor's house be one of these highly-favoured residences?

"Here we are," cried Philip, at length; "here is your new home, Edie. Take care; give me Miss Susy, and I will land her on *terra firma*. Go in, Edith; it is horribly raw and cold. Run in with Mary and baby, and I will see to the luggage."

Edith obeyed, first looking up at the tall, narrow, grimy-faced building that she was to inhabit. It had not the most promising aspect in the world. In the passage stood an elderly woman, who had been arranging things for the reception of the family; and she curtsied low to the mistress, and informed her that "everything was beautiful and clean, and in as good order as if the Queen were coming."

"Rather limited and inadequate preparation for a possible or impossible reception of royalty," thought poor Edith, as her eyes rested on the very dark complexion of the walls and of the boards of the passage, staircase, and landing. O what boards! Would Matty ever scrub them white? Had they ever been white? Had they ever been cleaned since they were first laid down by some long-demised and forgotten carpenter? The lower part of the house was, as Edith well knew, entirely devoted to business; so she went straight up the blackened, uncarpeted stairs, and found herself on a tolerably spacious landing, upon which opened several doors. One of these was wide open, and Edith saw a well-lighted room, made more cheerful by a magnificent fire, and on the table the welcome tea-tray—set out, certainly, after a peculiar fashion, but not the less welcome for all that. Edith started, for there was certainly her own old tea-service—that which she had used ever since she first came to Myrtle-place. And yet she had seen it, as she imagined, for the last time the evening before; for being of the class of goods commonly called "breakable," it had been settled that it, as well as the dinner-set and the glass and china generally, with a few exceptions, should be left behind with those other things which were to become the property of Mr. Robert Anderson,

junior partner in the firm of Proctor and Anderson, Printers, Publishers, and Booksellers, &c., ——— street, London, and Castle-street, Liverpool.

"My own tea-things!" said Edith, colouring with pleasure. She was a silly little thing, and she loved the old cups and saucers, and plates and jugs, that had been hers so long, almost as if they were rational and sentient creatures. By this time Philip was by her side, and heard her exclamation: she turned to him, saying, in much perplexity, "How did they come here, Philip?" I am sure they were in Castle-street last night; I went over them by the inventory myself; and we could not have brought them with us, for nothing is unpacked; and here they are."

"A real piece of magic for you!" said Philip, gaily. "My dear, though I am so tired, I cannot help being highly entertained at your puzzled expression of countenance; but as the kettle boils and as the tea-caddy stands so invitingly before you, suppose you were to commence your reign in the new abode by that most delightful of all feminine performances, the making of a first-rate cup of tea. Then I will tell you who was the conjurer, and by what necromancy he effected his purpose."

"I should like to take off my bonnet, and the countless cloaks and shawls in which I am fairly extinguished," said Edith, brightly. Somehow, the Philip who was even now unfastening a refractory button, seemed very like the Philip of old days. "I suppose I can find my bed-room and the nursery if I set about looking for them."

"Your bed-room is on the next landing over this room; I will take you there: but the nursery is higher still, in the back settlements yonder. Mrs. Gibbs, please take Matty to her new dominions." And Matty, gathering up a basket, an umbrella, a bandbox that had met a misfortune, and two children, set out on a voyage of discovery, with Mrs. Gibbs the charwoman as pioneer.

Edith, however, lingered to infuse the tea, and leaving it to draw, she also followed her husband to the unknown regions on the next story. And as she crossed the landing

she saw an open door and a long narrow passage, that in that uncertain light, and beheld for the first time, in all the excitement of recent arrival, seemed to lengthen itself out beyond all reasonable limits; giving access to chamber after chamber, oppressing Edith's mind with a ridiculous sense of being on the verge of infinite space. Infinite space in London, indeed! But the house was very large: for the business premises were immense, and the dwelling-rooms were in one sense under the same roof, though really this spacious habitation was compounded of two houses thrown into one, and certain back-offices with which a convenient communication had been established. Certainly there was room enough to do, as Matty said, "a power of business."

And so Mrs. Proctor thought, as she followed her husband to the upper story; and her heart misgave her as she remembered that large capabilities must also entail large liabilities; but, like a wise woman, she held her tongue, and kept her misgivings to herself. Her own room she could not much admire; it had been papered and painted certainly; but the original hue of the ceiling, which was a rich, warm brown, was rapidly wearing its way through the flimsy coating of whitewash, which had been bestowed upon it only a few days before. At present the black and the brown, rapidly absorbing the white, was of a fine slate colour, shading from the darkest hues down to a delicate mourning grey—not a favourable combination for anybody's bed-room ceiling, as you will readily allow. And then the floor, how it sloped and shook under Philip's manly tread! and what a colour! Never had there been a dingier lady's bower in all the annals of London life: what a contrast to Isabel's pleasant and luxurious boudoir! The two younger children were left to Matty's care in a nursery that seemed so far away that Edith thought it might have been in the next house but two; and she privately resolved to move the nursery establishment into her own more immediate neighbourhood ere she was twenty-four hours older. Mary she carried down-stairs into the drawing-room, for the child was nervous, and dreaded the shortest separation from her mother: she had unfortunately

heard Matty's incautious expressions of dread respecting the fire that, sooner or later, was to burn them all in their beds, and consume the dwelling to its foundations. The "fire-escape" seemed to her childish imagination a sort of horrible spectre, and it haunted her memory with terrible pertinacity. So, carefully wrapped up in one of mamma's largest and softest shawls, she was propped up with cushions at one end of the sofa, and bade be a good girl, and drink her tea quietly, and go to sleep afterwards as soon as she could.

"And how about the tea-things?" said Edith, surveying them with looks of absolute affection; "I am so curious to know how they came here?"

"There was no sorcery in the case, my dear; it is owing to my humble endeavours that your favourite sea-weed pattern is still before your eyes. I knew your conservative tendencies, and I thought you would take to the new house more kindly if some familiar objects met your eyes at the very outset. Come, I am anxious to have one of those very cups filled for my especial benefit."

Like one in a dream Edith went through her duties of tea-maker; at length she said, "I am still in a perfect state of mystification respecting the transportation of these things. Did you send them away after I counted them over last night? Did you strike them off Robert's inventory?"

"No; I did not. Really, Edith, I thought you would have detected the imposition long ago. Look at the slop-basin; where is that cherished crack you used so much to admire?"

Where, indeed? Edith took up the slop-basin, and, behold, it was sound and unblemished; then the milk-jug had its share of investigation, and that, also, was miraculously restored to its pristine comeliness. For years there had been a large piece chipped out of the mouth, and for this familiar fracture Edith looked in vain.

"They are not the same, Philip!"

"No, indeed! Here is the whole wonder explained. I saw how reluctantly you parted with those old companions of our married life, and at first I was tempted to transpot them

hither without your knowledge. But fearing breakages, and counselled by our good friend, Miss Wilson, I stole one of your cups, the broken one, my dear, without a handle, that used to stand in the kitchen cupboard, and brought it up with me when I came here a fortnight ago to make preparations; and I left my maimed cup with a very sensible tradesman in the Strand, who promised to get me a new set from the Potteries, of that exact pattern, and no other; and, as you see, he has kept his word, and executed the commission in right tradesman-like manner."

"Indeed he has. Thank you, Philip; thank you fifty times; it is very kind of you!"

"I wish you would drop that adjective *kind;* it is no compliment to speak of one's husband or wife as kind."

"Well! it was very *nice* of you; and I shall try to love the new tea-things even better than the old ones. What a goose I am to love inanimate objects! I believe I cried a little over the old bookcase, that I once thought such a handsome and imposing piece of furniture."

"Edith," said Philip, and his voice grew low, and deep, and rather unsteady; "with those old things, that we could not bring with us to our new home, shall we not leave behind us other things? Shall we not cancel somewhat of the past? I am ready to own that I have erred, that I wronged you very deeply by withholding that confidence you, of all women, of all wives, have deserved; and I think I can promise never to grieve you in like manner again. Henceforth I will keep nothing from you; why should I? If only you will consent to put away the past—that is, as much of the past as I would fain have you forget—I will take care that its memory shall never be revived by fresh experiences. Speak, Edith! will you not be your own sunshiny self once more—the dearest and the best wife that ever wore a wedding-ring?"

"I will try," she said, faintly, without looking up.

Neither the words nor the tone satisfied Philip; and after a moment's pause he continued—"I am willing to own, my dear, that I deserved your displeasure, even perhaps a slight *tem*porary alienation; but I do not think I do deserve this

protracted unkindness, especially as I do not hesitate to make candid avowal of my fault, and to declare my resolution of acting towards you in future with the fullest unreserve. Edith! with all your sweetness and gentleness, your nature is harder than mine; I know I have not been by any means a model husband; I have often tried your temper and wearied your patience, and I have often been selfish and inconsiderate; but I never could have pursued—calmly, deliberately, pursued a course of conduct which I knew was giving you cruel and unceasing pain. You were quite right in resenting my behaviour last July, but indeed, my dear, even if I were an entirely uninterested person, I am sure I should say you were wrong *now* in still nursing an implacable and unforgiving spirit."

"I am not unforgiving, Philip, indeed. I forgave you from the bottom of my heart, even before the evening of that unhappy day. And I will try to be as I once was. But, indeed, one cannot love and unlove at will."

"My dearest Edie! do you know I am afraid you are getting a little, just a little, sentimental? If I had wronged you to the farthest extent, you could hardly hold back more determinately. The worst thing was letting Estelle know anything about it. But that I really could not help; she forced herself into our counsels, and Edwin consulted her from the very first. Nay, I am persuaded it was she who originated the idea of partnership. She put it into Edwin's head; for it was he who suggested it to Robert, as well as to myself."

"I don't see what Edwin had to do with our—with your affairs. Of course, if he were concerned in the business, Estelle would be more or less mixed up with it. But why should Mr. Haughton think of any partnership? Why should he choose Robert Anderson? And why should he so sedulously keep from my knowledge a scheme which must so thoroughly affect my interests, and the interests of those dearest to me?"

"Listen, Edith. I will tell you the bare truth; though I would rather not have told it to-night, for I am depressed,

and you are tired. You did know that Edwin lent me money when I first commenced business in Castle-street?"

"Yes; you told me that at the very outset; but I thought it was paid back."

"Only a part of it; only a part of the original loan—and I have had other sums since. Once he took up a bill for me; and when I enlarged my business two years ago, he lent me three hundred pounds. I have never been able to pay back any of this money, and last Midsummer—no, it was in May, just before Whitsuntide, he came to me and said he could wait no longer; he had had losses, and had spent more than he cared to think about, and he could afford to stand out of the money no longer. I was at my wits' end, Edie, for altogether, with interest and principal, it was more than five hundred pounds. Edwin was inexorable, I was in despair; I was on the point of telling you all about it, when Edwin came to me one morning, after a long conversation with Robert, and proposed the partnership. At first I would not hear of it; but after a time I listened; the temptation was very great; two-thirds of my debt to Edwin were to be paid immediately, and the rest satisfactorily provided for. The idea of this business was not started till afterwards; and both Robert and Edwin urged that if you were aware of our intended arrangements they would never be completed. And so I yielded; but I never dreamed of the malice which would prompt Estelle to be first to communicate to you, affairs which you ought to have learnt from my lips alone."

"I see. Do not let us talk more about it, Philip. I will try to forget it."

Just then some one came in to say Mr. Proctor was wanted; he went out, but soon returned. "Only a message from Mrs. Etherington to know if I had arrived, and if I could see her to-morrow at noon."

"Who is Mrs. Etherington?"

"The widow of the poet, Eric Etherington, and the author of several popular books. My predecessors were her publishers, and we shall go on together if we can agree. You have one of her books, a very lovely little story, written

before her marriage, consequently the title-page bears her maiden name, 'Millicent Kendrick.'"

"Millicent Kendrick! you don't mean to say that she and this Mrs. Etherington are one and the same person?"

"Yes! just as much as Edith Scott and Mrs. Proctor are identical."

"And she is coming here to-morrow; how nice! I shall like to know her; I never knew a real live author or authoress."

"You will find them very much like ordinary mortals, my dear; and you will see plenty of them, for we are in the very heart of the great publishing world. Everybody is either author, editor, or publisher."

CHAPTER XXV.

A NEW FRIEND.

A FEW more days, and Edith was quite at home in her new abode: she was used to the dingy walls and the uneven floors; and the mighty voice which told the hour from the great cathedral would soon be familiar as that other "iron tongue of time" which she had heard so often during the years of her residence in Castle-street. The air of the City did not disagree with her; she felt quite well, and stronger than she had been through the summer and autumn of the year; neither did little Susy and the baby seem any the worse for the change, and, notwithstanding Matty's prognostications to the contrary, they grew fatter and stronger all through that long and somewhat dismal winter.

But Edith had, even from their first arrival, many fears for her first-born. The journey had shaken her considerably; her nerves were unstrung; the gloomy look-out, the dense atmosphere, the loud clamour of the streets seemed to distress her exceedingly; and her mother, who watched her with

many a silent misgiving, saw her pale cheek grow paler, and her slight frame become more wasted, as the dark chilly months of November, December, and January rolled away.

But as the child's bodily strength decayed, her intellectual faculties were unfolded with marvellous rapidity; there was something unnatural in the singular quaint remarks she made from time to time, and in the questions she asked—remarks and questions that were more suited to the capacities of a reasoning, clear-minded woman, than to the faculties of a child, whose little life had run its course but for the short space of five years. Ah! but five years of suffering are not like five years of health; and God, who knows what blossoms of the spring-tide shall be garnered in, with the full-blown flower, and the ripened wheat, can and does meeten for early blessedness those who are never to rejoice in summer's perfect bloom, or to bend beneath the heat, and burden, and toil of autumnal days. They, also, as the saints of riper age, go from strength to strength, till they behold their Master's face in righteousness.

Philip was busy—very busy—at times overwhelmingly busy; if he were not successful it was clearly no fault of his. If "Stick to your business, and your business will stick to you," be a true aphorism, Mr. Proctor might be reasonably sure that he was on the high road to fortune. Early and late he was at his post; no important trust was committed to hirelings, no duties foregone for the sake of ease and inclination. The master's quick eye and watchful thought were over every department of the business; there was nothing in which he disdained to be foremost and most energetic, nothing so trifling, so apparently inconsiderable that he thought it beneath his own special and very careful supervision.

All through the winter he rose, as Edith said, at most unearthly hours; sometimes she would be roused from her own balmy slumbers by some sound or movement near at hand, and half opening her sleepy eyes she would see Philip making a rapid toilet by the half-turned-on gaslight; while all without was black and freezing and silent as death, only that through the icy air would come the deep tones of St.

Paul's chiming one, two, three, four quarters, and then the hour of five. Five o'clock on a starless wintry morning, the thermometer below freezing point, stillness over the great City, even in the haunts of vice and crime, where guilt loves the darkness and the friendly shadows of the long December night! Enough to make one shiver and falter, however strong may have been the resolutions of the preceding night. But Philip never faltered, though doubtless he often shivered as he left Edith sweetly reposing on her pillow, while he made a vigorous plunge into the day's duties by dressing with benumbed fingers in the dim light, which he trusted would not disturb his wife and the baby, and then by setting to work in his own dark little den, where sometimes he lighted his fire, and sometimes not, because he grudged the time which this performance consumed, albeit Matty cleansed the grate every night and laid the coals and sticks all ready for kindling. But then, as she said, "Master wasn't clever at fire-lighting; men were always great unhandy things; and these wretched London coals were enough to make a body mad. Even she couldn't get the knack of managing them: if they were left alone they went out; if they were poked up vigorously, and knocked to pieces after the old country fashion, they went out also; it was enough to provoke a saint."

And when, in the first struggling beams of the grey dawn, Edith came down-stairs, she found that Philip had done half a day's work, and had already invaded the pantry, cutting huge hunches from the loaf, and drinking the milk at discretion, or indiscretion, as the case might be. He was, however, quite ready for the regular breakfast; but he frequently went over his letters, or looked through his memorandum-book, while he scalded his throat with hasty draughts of tea, and bolted the nicely-buttered toast, which Edith's own hands had prepared. Then, when the meal was over, he would stretch himself and yawn, declaring he was more ready for bed than for business, and yet, after a few minutes' indulgence, tell himself that "loitering over the fire would never do," and run straight down-stairs, and plunge at once into all the bustle and turmoil of the day's business, the tide of which

was, by this time in the morning, beginning to set in pretty strongly. All day long, and every day, sometimes in the house, and sometimes abroad, Philip Proctor toiled and schemed, with the energy and industry of several men, rather than with the mere stress and perseverance of one single unit in the great, busy world of publishers; and what he achieved was certainly in proportion to his labour. He brought his work to a completion while other men were thinking about it, or giving orders respecting it to the underlings of their establishments. And, as time went on, the firm of "Proctor and Anderson" became famous for punctuality, exactitude, despatch, and superiority in many little departments of the trade.

But Edith sometimes feared lest Philip might be overtasking his physical forces. On he laboured through the dreary winter, and still on, as the days lengthened and brightened, and the almanack told its readers that spring had already commenced its welcome reign. And sometimes she felt sad as she thought how the cares of this world seemed choking up the last remains of the good seed that she had once hoped were sown in her husband's heart. Edith had found for herself a new spiritual home; but Philip generally had some excuse why on Sunday morning he was unable to accompany her to church; and the evening service he had long discontinued, and seemed in nowise inclined to resume under new auspices, and in the changed circumstances of his present life. He was always so tired, he said, that it would be worse than useless to attend a place of worship; he should only drowse through the prayers, even if they were as good as Mr. Stanton's, and sleep through the sermon, whatever might be its merit, power, or eloquence. He liked to indulge on the Sabbath morning, rising late, and lingering over his breakfast; in the afternoon he liked to take a walk towards the West-end, or on the Surrey side of the water; and the evenings he was glad to devote to literature, which now was more fascinating and engrossing than ever. How often he compared himself to Tantalus, plunged up to the chin in the very element of his choice, and yet unable, from lack of

leisure, to profit by what an uninitiated person might believe to be the most golden of opportunities!

And all this time Edith had never been gratified in her desire of meeting and knowing Mrs. Etherington. Philip *was* her publisher, and they worked together most harmoniously; but it so happened that in her visits to the City she had never seen the Mrs. Proctor for whom she so kindly inquired, and who, remembering some experiences of her own life, she so greatly pitied for being shut up in the very heart of that great, bustling, dingy, grimy city.

One morning, early in April, Edith was sitting at her never-ending sewing, with the children around her, when Philip came up-stairs, his face eager and pleased, and yet hurried from press of business. "Edith, my dear, here is Mrs. Etherington! I know you will entertain her for an hour. I must be gone in five minutes; I must catch the next train to Richmond, and see Mr. Kenyon. Mrs. Etherington, permit me to introduce you to my wife; she will make you most welcome for as long a time as you can conveniently remain. Excuse me; good morning. I promise you those proofs by noon to-morrow."

And Philip was gone, and Edith, who felt dreadfully nervous at the idea of entertaining an authoress, found herself standing face to face with a lady in widow's weeds, whom she was begging to be seated, and whom she was welcoming very heartily and respectfully, but withal in very indifferent English. She need not have been nervous and timid: a gentler, sweeter, more considerate woman than Millicent Etherington never lived. She took now the seat Mrs. Proctor offered her, and, extending her hand, expressed her regret at not having made sooner the acquaintance which was now to commence. "Indeed, Mrs. Proctor," she said, "I meant to come and see you as soon as you were settled here, but all my interviews with your husband before Christmas were, from one cause or another, sadly hurried; and then, I accompanied my step-mother, Mrs. Kendrick, to Ventnor, and I was so taken up with nursing her through a very tedious convalescence, that I quite threw aside all literary occupations;

and, in order to devote myself entirely to the invalid, suspended, till my return to town, the business in which I was actually engaged. I have not been back many days, and I hasten to resume my labours, and trust to make your acquaintance with all speed and pleasure."

Edith looked admiringly at her new friend; a sweeter, truer, more expressive face she had never seen. Mrs. Etherington seemed to be about thirty-five years of age; she was rather above the middle height, her voice was clear and low, and her manners were at once dignified, frank, and cordial. Edith felt sure she had found a friend—a friend in whom she could trust, and on whose judgment and advice she might safely rely. There are some faces in the world that carry with them their own passport to love, and trust, and confidence; and such was the face that, from beneath the close cap and the widow's crape, now looked out upon Edith's pleased gaze; cold must have been the heart that could look long on the grave, mild, yet serenely happy countenance of Millicent Etherington, and not be drawn towards its gentle owner. Edith was not cold—perhaps the least bit too impulsive—and her heart warmed at once to the new friend Philip had brought to her side that morning.

"And these are your little ones?" said Mrs. Etherington, lifting Susy into her lap. "Really this little lady does London smoke credit; and your baby, too, what a strong chubby little fellow he is, and how very good! There he lies, wide awake in his cradle, kicking out with those pretty little pink toes, and laughing at you with all his heart. And this, I suppose, is your eldest?"

She bent forward and smoothed Mary's wavy ringlets as she spoke; the child was lying on a sort of cushioned reclining board that had been made for her special use, for she never now tried to sit up, even for a minute. Whiter than ever was her shrunken little face, which looked old and worn, while the tiny emaciated figure might have been that of an unhealthy child of two. And the large dark wistful eyes looked up, and actually smiled with pleasure as they met the sweet compassionate gaze of the "pretty stranger

lady," as Mary called her, when she was giving Matty an account of the morning's occurrences. Mrs. Etherington asked no questions; she had too much delicacy to distress either mother or child, but her kind eyes filled with tears, and with increased tenderness of touch she stroked the silken curls that clustered round the young, weary, faded brow, while with the other arm she tightened her clasp on little Susy.

"You are fond of children," said Edith, more affirmatively than interrogatively; indeed, a woman who did not love children seemed always to Edith a most incomprehensible, unnatural creature.

"I do indeed love them," said Mrs. Etherington; and, as she looked at the three children, an expression of mingled love and anguish crossed her expressive features. "God has been very good to you," she continued; "such gifts as these are, indeed, among our choicest earthly treasures. You must come and see me, Mrs. Proctor, and bring these dear children with you; it is always pleasant to me to hear little merry voices and little pattering feet in my wide lonely house. And it is a pleasure I frequently enjoy, for I have many nephews and nieces; my two sisters are both blessed with large families—though, by the way, everybody may not count that such a blessing; only the Psalmist says, 'Blessed is the man who hath his quiver full of them,' and I suppose that he is to be believed in above all theories and precepts of political economy."

"I suppose so," said Edith, approvingly; "you have not then any little ones of your own?"

The next moment she was sorry she had been so thoughtless, for her visitor's countenance changed, her mild eyes filled with tears, and her lips quivered: years had passed since she had committed to the dust her one little bud of promise—the one child that God had given to crown the happiness of her singularly happy wedded life, but still a sudden reference to her loss always drove the colour from her cheek, the calm light from her eye, and filled her heart with a keen sense of pain and loneliness. It was but for a moment, however; she paused a moment, and then turning to Edith, she said—

"I cannot say I have no child, for I have one in heaven. I had but one, as fair a little blossom as ever smiled beneath these lower skies, and my Father and his Father saw fit to call him home while still pure from actual sin, still unconscious of this world's trials, and temptations, and sins. My baby never knew the pangs of remorse, the sense of guilt, the burden of shame: he never can know them now. To him I can say—I often do say—

'God took thee, in His mercy,
A lamb untasked, untried;
He fought the fight for thee,
He won the victory,
And thou art sanctified.'"

"But the trial must be very great, almost too great," said Edith, as she looked round on her own little flock, and thought of what it would be to part with any one of her darlings. "Do you know, Mrs. Etherington, I sometimes think if that kind of trial came upon me, I should be faithless—rebellious—it would be so hard to say, 'Thy will be done'?"

"I used to think so once, but with the trial strength came—besides, it seems to me that we need not disturb ourselves about our behaviour under future trials; it is enough if, under present crosses, we can cheerfully resign ourselves to our Father's will. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and 'Give us *this day* our daily bread,' mean more than this world's evil, or the common necessaries of this life. We should be careful only to have faith enough for the one day, confident that with to-morrow's needs God will send to-morrow's strength."

"Yes! but it is so difficult to put away all anxiety about the future."

"It is indeed; it needs the most perfect reliance on God's Word, the most child-like trust, not to weary ourselves about the coming years, that sometimes as it were seem to cast their shadows before them. I once knew an eminent Christian who was frequently very much distressed in mind, because he *thought* if certain trials should come upon him, he would

never be able to acquiesce with filial trust and patience in his Divine Father's will; and then he argued—'if he resisted his Father's will, could he be indeed a child?' Years rolled on, and it seemed as if the trial he dreaded might never come; but at last it came when least expected; and then, O joy! under the severest dispensations, under the most prolonged exercise of patience, there was faith and quiet, tranquil resting on God, and even gladness in the midst of sorrow! Never, in his brightest and serenest days, had that excellent servant of Christ, now gone to his rest, enjoyed such precious manifestations of his Master's love and care: he lived month after month in the full sunshine of God's presence, his soul filled with joy almost to rapture, and his whole life one sweet and prolonged communion with Him, from whom came the strength, and the trust, and the consolation, that made this painful stage of his mortal journey the pleasantest and the most precious of all he had ever passed."

"I will try to remember what you have said," answered Edith, smiling through her tears. "How much needless sorrow we cause ourselves by this want of faith! Every evening of our lives we may say gratefully, 'Ebenezer;' and yet we cannot trust One who has brought us thus far in security and peace, to bring us safely to the end—to the haven where we would be."

"Not in our young days," replied Mrs. Etherington. "It needs some experience of God's infinite goodness, and of our own helplessness and foolish vanity, before we can indeed feel that *all* our times are in the Almighty's hands, and that *all* things shall work together for good if only we are united to Christ our Lord by a living faith. But some hearts are tenderer than others; they melt at the first words of reproof, and they receive the Word in such simplicity, and trust their all where only mortal trust was never betrayed; and some need stroke after stroke, storm after storm, pruning after pruning, before pride is quelled, and self-will renounced: for, after all, do you not think it is making too much of ourselves, and resting on our own wisdom and right-mindedness, that shuts us out from that perfect faith, which would give us

clearer and larger vision, so that we might see straight on, beyond all the trials of the way, to the end of this mortal pilgrimage—to the threshold of eternal life?"

Edith sighed: she remembered the time when she too looked straight onward with faith and reverent trust to that fair and far-off close of the race set before her. It was not so now: clouds and mists too often gathered around her; earth and its cares seemed nearer—heaven farther off. It behoved her seriously to examine herself why it was thus. But it was time for Mrs. Etherington to go, and they parted under an agreement to meet at an early day at Mrs. Etherington's house, at St. John's Wood, and the children were to be there also.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TWILIGHT HOUR.

"To-MORROW, mamma, we shall go and see the nice, kind lady that stroked my hair," said little Mary, as she lay in her mother's arms in the grey, dusky city twilight, luxuriating in the quiet talk and the easy nursing she enjoyed so much. "Does she not look very nice?"

"Very, my darling; she has such kind eyes, and altogether so clear and true and sweet a face. And she writes beautiful books, too, that you may read when you are a little older; indeed, there is one about little girls not much above your own age—at least, so papa tells me—and I will ask him to send up the 'Row' and get it, and then you and I will read it together."

"That will be just what I should like, mamma; I am sure it will be a good book. Is it long ago since it was written?"

"Yes; it is one of Mrs. Etherington's very early books, or else papa would have it himself; it was written when she

was still Miss Kendrick. We will ask papa about it this very evening, my Mary, for you have quite finished all your books, I think."

"Yes, mamma; and O, I do so like that 'Look up; or, Girls and Flowers,' that you read to me! I am trying to read it myself, and I know nearly all the words. I told Matty all about it, and last night I lay awake thinking what flower I would be like if I could."

"And what flower did my little daughter choose?"

The child's delicate face flushed, as she answered, "I don't quite like to say, mamma; I don't know, but I think it was naughty."

"Tell me, dear; I do not well see how it could be naughty; but when I know all about it I can form my opinion."

"Well, then, mamma, I thought I could not be like the rose, for it is pretty and bright; nor like the laurustinus, for that, as the book says, stands upright of itself; nor like the laurel that yearned for the palm, for I am not clever: but I thought—I thought of that white lily, that was very little and had only green buds on it, that Mrs. Haughton had in her boudoir ever so long ago, when we were spending the day there."

Edith had no recollection of any particular lily, for Isabel's room was always fair and fragrant with choice flowering plants; so she answered, "Well, my love, a lily is a very pretty flower, and it gives one very pleasant thoughts; I should like my little Mary to resemble the lily in many ways. But why should you think your wish was naughty?"

"Mamma, the little green buds of that lily never opened. Mrs. Haughton said it was a sickly thing that the gardener had cast away, and she was nursing it up just because it was so delicate, for she knew it was a very sweet, rare sort of lily. But it was all of no use; the next time we went the lily was gone, and I asked where it was, and some one said it had grown more and more faded and sickly, till at last it died, and there was something very gay and fine in its place—but I did not care for it as I cared for the poor dead lily that couldn't be made better anyhow."

"But, my child, you do not mean that you would like to die, and be seen no more, like the poor lily?"

"I thought so in the night: I couldn't sleep, my back hurt me so, and my head ached, and I ached all over; and I thought, mamma, I should never be well and strong like Susy, and it seemed very nice to think about heaven, where nobody is ever poorly or naughty, and I said over to myself that hymn that begins:—

'Around the throne of God in heaven,
Thousands of children stand.'

And then I remembered the other that you sing to us so often —the one that ends in every verse with—'But, what must it be to be there?' and I couldn't help asking Jesus Christ to make me very good, and take me there very soon. Was it naughty, mamma?"

Edith turned away her head to wipe the fast-falling tears; and it was several minutes before she could reply, "I think not, darling; only you must be quite content to stop on earth just as long as God wills it: He knows how much you can bear, my precious child, and He will never lay too much upon you. When you are quite ready for that happy land 'far away,' when He sees fit to take you there, He will be sure to call for you. Till then, my darling, you must have patience; you must be ready to go when He calls you, and yet willing to stay with us as long as He pleases."

"I can never do any good, mamma, to any one—can I?"

"Yes, dearest, you can: you can bear your pain and your weariness patiently. You know what I told you about 'bearing the cross,' a little time ago. All God's own dear children have *some* cross to bear; sometimes it is a cross like yours, that everybody can see, and sometimes it is a cross that no one knows anything about except the person who feels it; but, whatever kind of cross it be, the thing is to bear it cheerfully, knowing that it comes from God, and that it is sent to make us better, and to keep us from loving this world too much."

"Then, mamma, has everybody a cross to bear?"

"All who love the Lord Jesus Christ have certainly a cross, my child. He says Himself, 'If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow Me;' and sometimes God sends crosses to people who do not love Him, in order that they may think less about this world and its cares and its pleasures, that can only endure for a very little time, that so, when they are disappointed and unhappy, they may turn to Him, whom to know is life eternal, and whom to love is joy and peace, under any circumstances."

"Mamma, have you any cross?"

"Yes, my dear; but if I were to talk to you about my cross you would not understand. The cross is very heavy, and very hard to bear sometimes, Mary; but there will come a time, darling, when it will give no more pain or sorrow; when all who have borne it meekly and lovingly will lay it down for ever; and instead thereof receive, from the Master's hand, the crown, and the palm, and the white robe."

"And every night, mamma, that time comes nearer and nearer, does it not?"

"Yes, my dear Mary: every night we are nearer our heavenly rest—'a day's march nearer home.'"

"O, those verses, mamma, that Mrs. Stanton gave you—were they not nice?—those about being 'nearer home to-day that I ever have been before.' Just say one to me, for they will come in directly to light the gas."

Edith repeated the three first verses of that beautiful hymn, then little known, but now printed in several collections:—

"One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er;
I am nearer home to-day
Than ever I've been before.

Nearer my Father's house,
Where the many mansions be;
Nearer the great white throne,
Nearer the crystal sea.

Nearer the end of life
Where I lay my burden down
Nearer leaving the cross,
Nearer wearing the crown."

And when Edith had finished and kept silence, thinking of "the dark and unknown stream," and of the "*light*" beyond, the child repeated to herself, over and over again, till her mother could bear it no longer—

"For it may be I'm nearer home—
Nearer now than I think."

It was a relief when Philip came into the room, telling them they were like bats and owls to love the darkness, and begging that the gas might be lighted immediately, and the blinds drawn down, and the gloomy outside world shut out. And then he put something soft, and sweet, and cool against Mary's cheek, saying, "What are those, pussy-cat? Can you tell me their name without seeing them?"

Philip had been much gentler to his little daughter ever since their removal from Liverpool.

She put out her tiny, trembling hand quite eagerly, and the thin fingers twined lovingly round her prize as she exclaimed, "O, dear papa, they are primroses—sweet, dear, yellow little primroses! Are they for me? Did you gather them?"

"They are for you, pussy-cat; and I cannot exactly say I gathered them, for I bought them out of a basket in St. Paul's-churchyard, where primroses, and cowslips, and tulips never think of growing. Do you like them?"

"O! so much: I shall put them in the china cup Matty gave me on my birthday."

"So it is primrose-time again, is it?" said Edith, and there was just a perceptible shade of sorrow in her tone. She did so long for the country, for a sight of the budding hedges, and the springing flowers, and the young lambs feeding in the green fields, far away from the noise and bustle of the great city: never since she left the lovely rural scenes of her childhood had she so longed—nay, almost pined—for the fresh breezes, and the verdant lanes, and the deep blue sky, dappled with white clouds, and undimmed by any veil of smoke, or low brooding vapour. Those high, dark walls, those gables and parapets in every direction, seemed at times to frown and

hem her in, as though they would shut out for ever the clear shining sky, and the fresh pure airs, and the tender foliage of trees and shrubs. City life was all very well in the winter, but now that the breath of spring was awakening new life and beauty over all the land, it became gloomy, sad, and oppressive. Certainly Castle-street had been anything but a rural abode, primroses eschewed St. George's-crescent, equally with St. Paul's-churchyard; and Dale-street might be a dale in verity, but it had long since ceased to grow primroses, and cultivated omnibuses instead. But then there was the dashing, tossing Mersey so near, with its salt breezes—the broad, beautiful estuary, on whose bosom one seemed to float as on the great restless sea itself. And there were the Eastham woods, and the flat shores of Waterloo and Crossby, where one might see the Welsh hills rising in their lonely grandeur far, far away, and on very clear summer evenings even the mighty Penmanmawr himself.

So with an inexpressible sense of regret Edith said, "Is it primrose time again?"

"Yes, dear," returned Philip; "it looks very much like it, for they are hawking them about in the streets pretty plentifully. Edie, are you hankering after the country?"

"O, Philip! I am so silly. The faint scent of those primroses made me ready to cry; it seems so long, so very long, since I gathered any with my own fingers. Do you remember the last time? It was six years ago—the first spring after we were married—it was a lovely afternoon in April, and I was sitting mending your stockings in the dear little back parlour in Myrtle-place, and you came in and said you felt inclined for a little trip, and I was to run and put on my bonnet as fast as I could; and then we hurried down to the landing-stage and just caught the Eastham boat, and what an afternoon we had in those woods! We staid till the stars were out, and we lingered about the little pier, waiting for the steamer to come up, listening to the dash of the water on the piles beneath, and watching the moon rise large and red over the Dingle woods, as it seemed. And I had a basket quite full of primroses, roots and all, that I was going to set in a box out

of which you had contrived a sort of Wardian case—do you remember?"

"I remember it very well. I can hear now the lapping of the water on the shore, and the sighing of the wind in the uppermost branches of the still leafless trees. We were quite alone, and we did not care how long the boat delayed, for it was so warm and balmy a night—such as one seldom experiences in April in our chilly northern latitudes, and you were quoting Longfellow—

> 'As sweeping and eddying through them
> Rose the belated tide;
> And streaming into the moonlight
> The sea-weed floated wide.'

Yes! it all comes back again when I think of that evening, and you and I, with the pure scent of the woodlands yet upon us, watching that broad red moon rise silently on the opposite shore, and by-and-by making golden network in the broad water on whose margin we were standing. You wore your winter dress still, but you had on a new straw bonnet trimmed with white, I think. We were very poor then, Edith; we were obliged to think about every shilling we spent; but I really believe we were never happier than then."

"Never!" said Edith, emphatically. "I don't know how it was, but that first year, especially that spring and summer, always seemed to me as fair, and sweet, and golden as dream-life. I suppose we had cares then—we must have had, for you know, for many months after we were married, we did very little business; and we were sometimes anxious when we thought about the next rent day; but nevertheless, I am sure we went on our way cheerfully and hopefully, and we were very happy."

"Yes; and what a perfect little manager you were! If I had had an unthrifty wife in those days, it would have been all up with me very soon, I can tell you. Ah! I shall always say it is a far better thing to have a fortune in your wife than receive one with her. But, my dear, I must not stop chattering here so foolishly about 'auld lang syne;' I have five good

hours' work before me, ere I am ready for bed; and that little maid, too, must be tired, and wanting to shut up her poor little peepers. I want you to look over some proofs for me; shall you have time?"

"Plenty of time. Whose are they?"

"Some of them are Mrs. Etherington's; the rest are belonging to Mr. Heathcote, a friend of hers."

"Heathcote! is he a Reverend?"

"Yes; the Rev. Leonard Heathcote; he is a minister now; but he used to be in business. He was once clerk in a mercantile house in Cannon-street, hard by; then he was made partner, and the firm was "Hardacre Brothers, and Heathcote.' Several years ago—so he told me himself—he thought he saw the way clear to what had long been the desire of his heart, and that was to enter the ministry. He seems to be one of those naturally gifted for the office. Mrs. Etherington says, when he was quite a young man, with a salary of £70 or £80 per annum, he kept up a sort of ragged-school, and used to go visiting the sick, and the very poor, and preaching in a sort of impromptu, amateur style to all the wretched creatures that live in courts and alleys, and other miserable places of this great city."

"He must be a good man," said Edith, warmly; "and what are you publishing of his now?"

"Only some very simple sermons; the language is, as you will see, as simple as possible; yet the style is elegant, and the thoughts most original. He is evidently a man of great earnestness, and, withal, of an extremely tender and affectionate nature; besides which, he is no mean scholar, and more completely the gentleman than any one I have seen for a long time; nay, I am not certain that I *ever* saw any man whom I could so thoroughly and honestly admire."

"I shall be curious to see Mr. Heathcote; has he a wife?"

"The first thing you women always ask about a man!" said Philip, laughing. "The next question is—'what is he like?'"

"Of course it is the first thing," returned Edith. "All good women—I, of course foremost among them—are very

sorry for any good man who is not blessed with a wife. Fancy the unhappy creature coming home—if home it can be called—from his business or his ministerial toils, and finding there no preparation for his comfort, no pleasant face to look up and welcome him, or better still to answer his knock and open the door for him—no one to whom he can tell what he has heard, what he has seen, what he wishes, and what he thinks! I am very sorry for all unwived good men! Now, then, please to answer my question—is Mr. Heathcote married?"

"Yes, he is not at all in a position to require your pity: he has a remarkably nice pretty little wife whom he calls 'Lottie.' I should think every time he comes in from his studies or his labours, her face is a veritable sunbeam; and I must also tell you, what I am sure will gratify you extremely, they seem to have about half-a-dozen little children. You perceive, my dear, the Rev. Leonard Heathcote is, in your sense of the word, a remarkably fortunate man."

"And what is he like? You suggested the question yourself."

"I suppose one would not call him handsome; that is to say—and yet—really, I will not tell you; you shall have the entire pleasure of a first impression. I believe you will see him and his wife to-morrow at St. John's Wood."

"Indeed! why do you think so?"

"Mr. Heathcote was in my office two hours ago. I wanted him to come in, and have a cup of tea; but he had an engagement on the Surrey side, and could not stay. And he told me that he and Mrs. Heathcote were going to spend the evening to-morrow with Mrs. Etherington, and he had heard you and I were to be there also."

"And are you going with us?"

"Impossible; you might as well ask me to spend a day in Palestine. But as you are taking Matty with the children, Mrs. Etherington says she will send them back safely early in the evening in her own snug little brougham; and you must remain, and I will come out as soon as I can get done, and stay an hour, and bring you home."

"That will do nicely. But, Philip, I hardly like the children coming back without me. If I returned, as I intended, with them and Matty, you could still keep your engagement. I am always anxious about Mary if I am away from her."

Mary by this time had been carried off by Matty to bed, and so Edith could speak freely about her.

"Nonsense," said Philip, with a strong tinge of his old impatience, "the child does well enough. Matty always takes good care of her; indeed, I think, of the two, she spoils her more than you do." Then, perceiving Edith's cheeks flush—"Not that the child is naughty; she is a wonderfully good and patient little thing; only more like twelve years old than the mite of a creature she really is."

"Philip!"—and Edith's voice took that tone he had heard for the first time in the Castle-street drawing-room, on the day of Estelle's congratulatory visit—"I am unwilling to stay away from my child, because I think—I think she will not be with us very long."

Philip turned pale; for in spite of his old crossness, in spite of many a hasty word, he did love his first-born child—loved her more even than he himself knew, or suspected. The idea of his home without that poor, shrunken little figure, with its wan face and its white, wasted, tiny hands and arms, was more than he could immediately bear to contemplate.

"No, no, my dear," he said quickly, "your fears deceive you; she may never be quite strong, but she may mend yet; she may be our pet and our blessing when Susy is married, and our boy gone from us into the world. But I must go. Send me some biscuits and my cup of cocoa down-stairs about ten, and do not wait for me; it will be morning before I shall have quite finished. There are the proofs; look them carefully over—there's a good little publisher's wife."

And so saying, he went away; and Edith tried to forget herself in the pages before her. And so she spent the remainder of the evening over the glowing pages of her new friend, and the clear, beautiful, striking thoughts of the Reverend Leonard Heathcote, whom she was to know to-morrow.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HAPPY GATHERING.

"Really this part of London looks very respectable," said Matty, next day, when she, with her mistress and the children, were on their way to St. John's Wood.

"Undoubtedly it is highly respectable," replied Edith, with a half smile. "I perceive, Matty, you have scarcely learned to admire London yet, or you would own that all you have hitherto seen of it is respectable, while the quarter we are now approaching is something more: this is the West End, where are some of the grandest town residences in Europe: there is nothing in Liverpool to compare with this, Matty."

And Matty, though a little out-spoken occasionally, felt really too much respect for her mistress to think of gainsaying her word; nevertheless she was not at all convinced, and refused to award to London any superiority whatever over her beloved and native city, on the estuary of the Mersey, which said Mersey she was ever lauding to the skies, and comparing with old Father Thames, as he commonly appears beneath the bridges which span his discoloured, and not exactly fragrant, waters. At least, this was the tone Matty took to every one with whom she conversed; but her letters were quite a different thing; and John Fraser's imagination was continually fired by his sweetheart's homely but graphic descriptions of the great metropolis, and its splendours and immensity. This little diversity of expression was merely that peculiar perverse tendency which is common to many women, and by no means to Matty in particular.

"That is Primrose-hill," said Edith to Mary, as they skirted its base.

"O, mamma, could you not get out and gather some; it would be so nice; we should not mind waiting a little."

"My dear, there are no primroses now, though, I dare say, they once grew plentifully. You will find that places keep their names long after they have lost every claim to them; because, you see, the country by degrees grows into the town, and everything is changed. But I think we are at our journey's end—that is surely the house Mrs. Etherington described—yes, the carriage is stopping: Matty, take care of the baby and Susy; I must hold Mary."

The garden-gate was thrown open to receive them when they alighted, and on the gravel-walk stood Mrs. Etherington, her sweet face beaming the welcome she scarcely needed to speak. Little Mary thought her so pretty that her heart was fairly taken by storm; and she immediately decided that widow's weeds were the most becoming costume in the world, and innocently wished, for one thoughtless moment—poor little soul!—that her mamma would wear similar attire. But the next minute she remembered that a widow was a person whose husband was dead, and dire was her compunction—for the child almost worshipped her father, and thoroughly believed that his equal in all the world never existed. Perhaps this was because she had never heard her mother find fault with him; for Edith, through all things, had ever felt that her husband's errors, either great or small, were sacred, and never to be discussed with any living creature: above all were they never to be mentioned, never to be glanced at, in the presence of his children.

And I need not say that Edith Proctor acted rightly, and not only rightly but wisely; for the mutual recriminations of parents tend greatly to increase their difficulties with the children. And as for discussing the faults of either parent with the young people, it is obviously as unnatural as it is invidious, and injurious in more ways than one. Edith was far too right-minded to speak of any of her husband's failings, while Mary's quick little ears were open to catch every word that was uttered in her presence; indeed, she would have been perfectly ashamed of herself had she ever exposed any of

his mistakes or weaknesses to any third party whatever. Mothers may believe that complaints of a father's conduct never tend to any good result; rather do they diminish, and in some cases destroy, the natural reverence and esteem which, once lost, is seldom, if ever, restored. But then, some women have such an inveterate habit of discussing their husband's transgressions and shortcomings, of *meandering* over their own trials and supposed wrongs, that I really believe they can no more stop their senseless babble of small complaint than they can stay a mountain rivulet after it has left its source; and really it must be confessed that for one man who exposes his wife's petty faults to his acquaintances and friends, there are at least twenty women who pull their husbands' characters and proceedings to pieces with anybody who will listen; and so it comes to pass that, if no one else is at hand, young sons and daughters are entertained with the shameful story; and then, in after days, the mistaken mother is astonished that she does not receive more devoted affection from her boys, more duty and respect from her girls.

Mrs. Etherington took the baby in her arms; he was a fine boy now, of sixteen months, and Edith feared there would be a terrible outcry, for he was just of the age when infants are most accustomed to treat with very demonstrative displeasure the attentions of strangers; but, to her surprise, he crowed, and laughed, and put up his fat, dimpled hand to catch the bright waves of rippling hair that escaped from the close white cap, and, ere his mother could interpose, he had succeeded in dragging down the soft braids till they fell in ringlets around the sweet, intellectual face, that seemed winning little Philip's heart, as well as his sister's.

"O, naughty boy!" said Edith, only half annoyed; "pray take him directly, Matty; I must apologize for him, Mrs. Etherington."

"No need to do that," she replied, brightly; "it is quite a treat to feel baby-fingers tugging at my hair; you cannot think what a pleasure it is to me to have a little one in my arms. And they all come to me; I do not believe the child exists who would turn away from me; they acknowledge me

as a sort of universal aunt. But pray come in, Mrs. Proctor; I am keeping you out of my house in most inhospitable fashion."

They went in, and there, in the drawing-room, Edith found another lady, who, she felt certain, was no other than Mrs. Heathcote. She was right; and in five minutes she was settled at her work, talking to her new acquaintance with a charming sense of ease and appreciation that made her feel as if she had known the good pastor's wife for at least half her life. She did not wonder that Philip called her a "nice, pretty little thing," "a veritable sunbeam" in the home she blessed and brightened by her presence; and her name, too—Lottie—it just suited her. And Edith began to congratulate herself on her own good fortune in falling in with two women so delightful and so excellent as Mrs. Etherington and Mrs. Heathcote.

They had an early dinner on account of the children, and Edith found all care of Mary taken off her hands by Mrs. Heathcote's eldest little girl, Margaret.

Miss Margaret was not at all like her mamma, for Mrs. Heathcote's hair was black and her eyes hazel, while her young daughter was continually tossing back from a broad, fair brow a perfect wealth of golden-brown ringlets and laughing with her rather roguish-looking violet eyes, as well as with her pretty little mouth, that seemed ready for kissing everybody and being kissed by everybody in return. And for one moment there flashed a keen pain through Edith's heart, for by the side of her bright, healthy-looking little companion, poor Mary looked more shrunken and faded and deformed than ever; and Mrs. Heathcote's gentle eyes filled with tears more than once as she watched her little girl tenderly aiding the puny, feeble child, whose nerveless fingers could scarcely grasp the spoon with which she wished to eat the preserved fruit on her plate. And while her loving heart went up in thanksgiving to God who had made her own darling so straight and blooming, it was filled with a keen sorrow for the mother and for the child whom that day she saw for the first time. For very tender and pitiful and

warm-hearted was Lottie Heathcote, the wife of one of the best and most devoted of Christ's ministering servants in the great London world, where his lot was cast and his work assigned him.

After dinner Susy and the baby went up-stairs with Matty, and Mary and Margaret were comfortably ensconced in a corner of the sofa with plenty of picture books and a spelling puzzle; so the three ladies resumed their work round the little table in the deep bay-window looking down upon a garden-plot that gave promise of considerable beauty when the season should be farther advanced. They were all busy—not one of the three had leisure for "idle hands," and in this they were certainly fortunate, for there cannot be anything more unfortunate to persons in full health than lack of proper employment. Mrs. Etherington had always as much to do as it was possible to perform, and perhaps sometimes a little more. She had her Bible-class of young women; her sewing party of young ladies who came to her house every month and listened to her reading and to her familiar discussion of many things that were calculated to make them in the years to come better daughters, wives, and mothers—better members of the great social circle, and better Christians. Also Mrs. Etherington had certain poor families whom she regularly visited, and she was accustomed to perform many labours of love for the families of her two sisters, who were not in circumstances quite so affluent as her own; and when to these occupations were added her own studies and literary engagements, it must be owned that she was no sluggard in the vineyard of the Master whom she served. That Edith could never want employment was obvious, which assurance every thrifty matron, perched on the topmost spray of economy, with three young children, will receive in perfect good faith. And really, considering Mrs. Heathcote, and her five little ones, and all the works of mercy and charity which she shared with her noble-minded husband, it is difficult to say which of the two had a right to consider herself the busier.

"I suppose Mr. Heathcote is your pastor," said Edith to Mrs. Etherington, feeling quite sure that such was the case.

"No, indeed," was the reply; "I do hear him occasionally, but I am much too grand a person for Mr. Heathcote to take under his pastoral care. He always felt that his work lay among the very poorest and the most miserable, and for many years he laboured in some of the worst quarters of London as a kind of amateur city missionary. When at length he became an ordained minister, he still chose to toil among the class in which his interest was the deepest, and by whom he was certainly regarded with the deepest and most unmingled affection. He was offered a charge in one of the fashionable districts, but he never wavered in his choice; he was faithful to his first love, the poor of the courts and alleys, and such streets as were shunned and dreaded by the respectable enlightened world; and to them he has dedicated his life. I need not tell you that Mrs. Heathcote is his best helper in all his undertakings."

"I honour your husband," said Edith, shortly but earnestly, to Mrs. Heathcote. And Mrs. Heathcote's bright dark eyes were dimmed for half a minute by something wonderfully like tears, and tears they were—happy, grateful tears of joy for the blessedness that was her portion on this side heaven.

How pleasantly that sunny afternoon passed away! Never had Edith more thoroughly enjoyed a friendly conversation; so many subjects were discussed, so many interesting topics touched upon, so much that was sweet, and true, and wise fell from the lips of both her companions. And, though in the society of two women of the highest cultivation, Edith felt no shyness, no fear of her own shortcomings. It is only the pretender to extraordinary cleverness and acquirements who seeks to make you feel your own inferiority; true genius, real culture, genuine scholarship never *strives* to shine, never exults in its own superior lustre, which must perforce put out all smaller luminaries who are rash enough to attempt a little sparkling within the verge of its orbit.

Five o'clock came before Edith could imagine it was four, and she had just concluded with Mrs. Etherington to send Matty home directly after tea with the two younger children and keep Mary to return with Philip and herself, when the

bell rang, and Mrs. Heathcote exclaimed, "That is my husband! I always know Leonard's ring—I always did!"

Mrs. Etherington laughed. "I think," she said, "one might write a chapter on the philosophy of knocks, but I greatly doubt whether the same could be done for rings; one ring is so very much like another, for it is only a question of pulling the bell-handle with more or less force; whereas one may execute all kinds of performances on door-knockers. But here *is* Mr. Heathcote, a living proof that a ring of the bell *may* have certain characteristics of its own."

Edith looked to receive that first impression of which her husband had generously left her the full benefit. Yes, Leonard Heathcote was just what she imagined the author of those sermons must be like; she did not wonder at Philip's unreserved admiration, for never had she seen a face of equal purity, strength, gentleness, and goodness combined. And yet its beauty was not that which is commonly so called; there was a broad, clear, pale brow, grey eyes, soft, lustrous, and deep; a mouth that betrayed a womanly tenderness, matched with true virile strength and firmness, and clustering light hair, that in the sunlight looked nearly golden; and yet not from these sprang the true beauty of that expressive countenance: it was the impress of perfect peace, the aspect that told of deepest musings, and constant spiritual communings, the grandeur and simplicity of the soul within, shining out, as such souls ever will, through the mortal lineaments, that gave to Leonard Heathcote the look he wore.

Edith was very glad that Philip liked him; she knew not why, but she hoped that his influence might, in some way, be blessed to her husband. Mr. Stanton had been enthusiastically admired, honoured, revered, and in a certain sense appreciated; but his words had never touched Philip Proctor's heart: many an arrow had been shot off at a venture, but not one had gone home; and the good pastor, though mourning over his many unsuccessful efforts, had almost rejoiced at his hearer's removal to another scene. Perhaps a less familiar voice might be privileged to speak the truths convincingly, which his had so often, and so long, proclaimed in vain.

Edith knew that Mr. Stanton felt this, and she hoped most fondly that Mr. Heathcote *might* be the chosen messenger of glad tidings to the soul that had so long, of its own free will, sat in fetters, and sackcloth, and darkness. That Mr. Heathcote would converse much with Philip on any subject without speaking of the one grand theme of salvation that seemed to be continually and instinctively on his lips, Edith knew was impossible: if they had dealings together, if they talked about business or literature, or the topics of the day, he would be sure not to bid farewell ere he had spoken a word for his Master: it was clear that he recognized the Divine command to be instant in season and out of season, and waited for the blessing that is promised to those who sow beside all waters; to those who cast their bread upon the waters, trusting to find it again after many days, in the morning sowing the good seed in faith and joy, and in the evening withholding not the hand.

Very soon after tea Philip came in; he declared he had not given himself so much license since his beginning business in London, and that both Mrs. Etherington and Mr. Heathcote must not be astonished if their own matters were somewhat delayed by this piece of self-indulgence on his part. And then, having taken some tea, which Mrs. Etherington insisted on making afresh for his benefit, he fell into a conversation with Mr. Heathcote, which lasted till the evening was somewhat advanced. Then there was a call for music, and Mrs. Etherington opened her piano and invited her lady-guests to sit down; but Mrs. Heathcote declined; music was not her *forte*, she said, though her husband could never be made to believe that her playing was not super-excellent; and Mrs. Etherington herself never now touched the instrument; so Edith was persuaded to take the music-stool, and try something that used to be one of her most successful performances in days of yore. But it was in vain that she strove to remember the brilliant variations that had once been so easy, so thoroughly at command; her fingers had lost their power, her touch its clear precision and elasticity; for the long-wished-for piano had never arrived, it was still among the promised luxuries that were to flow in upon her at some

future day, when the golden tide should at length set in, and float them on to wealth, grandeur, and every other earthly good.

After trying one thing and then another, Edith found she could only recollect one of her old favourites, Mozart's "Agnus Dei;" and that led on to the trying of other sacred pieces, which, however, were not so well remembered, and finally to hymn-tunes; and at last the hymn-books were brought out and the whole circle were very happy for a full hour over their singing, which sounded very sweetly in chorus, whatever it might have been when criticised as individual effort.

The little party broke up in good time, for the Heathcotes were professedly old-fashioned people, and they kept early hours on principle, while Philip and Edith had so far to go, and were so concerned to get little Mary home in safety and comfort, that their hostess sensibly made no effort to detain them, and they parted with the hope of meeting again very frequently, and knowing each other better in the time to come.

It was a calm bright starlight night; one planet cast its mild lustre over the clear begemmed sky, and the young moon had not yet sunk beneath the horizon, and Edith sat in the cab in silence, enjoying the soft beauty of the hour, the quiet aspect of the streets and squares, through which they drove, and the remembrance of the pleasantest evening she had passed for a very long while. Philip roused her from her reverie by saying, "Edie, do you know, I think those Heathcotes are the very nicest people I ever encountered? Didn't I tell you truth?—isn't he a capital fellow?"

Edith warmly assented, though "capital fellow" was not exactly, she thought, Mr. Heathcote's descriptive term.

Philip continued—"I do think he is a really good man, and he is good without boring you with his goodness; I cannot describe what it is, but there is something about him that very much attracts me, and yet, though he has wonderful originality, I do not think he is to be compared with Mr. Stanton in point of eloquence and real genius; but he has

said several things to-night that struck me more than anything I ever remember to have heard. I must have a little more talk with him some of these days And his wife is a nice little thing, is she not?"

Edith's heart was full of thankfulness; she would not ask what the things were that had struck Philip, but she felt sure they were exactly those which she wished him, above all else, to consider; and in happy silence, or occasional remarks, the rest of the drive passed.

They were met at the very threshold by Matty, evidently eager to disclose some highly important news; the mother's thoughts flew to the younger children, Philip wondered whether the premises had been on fire.

"What is it, Matty?" began her master, as he stepped into the house.

The reply came instantaneously—"Please, sir, Mrs. Haughton's come; she's in the drawing-room, and she looks ever so bad!"

Mr. and Mrs. Proctor exchanged looks, and went up-stairs immediately.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MORNING WATCHES.

YES! it was quite true. When Edith reached the drawing-room, there stood Isabel Haughton, leaning against the chimney-piece, as if for support. Her bonnet lay on the ground, as if hastily thrown off; her long dark hair hung heavy and uncurled round a face perfectly appalling in its deathly pallor and wild, excited aspect; and her hands nervously grasped the travelling mantle she still wore. It was clear that her visit was no ordinary one.

"Edith!" she exclaimed, as she sprang forward on the opening of the door, "I am come to claim your promise.

You said I should be always welcome, and I am come. I came to you, for I have nowhere else to go."

Edith looked her sorrow and consternation; she could scarcely be surprised at any step taken by the undisciplined, impulsive Isabel, but she was not prepared for that which had evidently taken place—it was very apparent that Mrs. Haughton had quitted her husband's house in a moment of ungoverned resentment; and knowing Edwin, as they did, Philip and Edith feared that such a procedure on the part of his wife would not be easily forgiven; and well they knew, also, how thoroughly Estelle's influence would work against any attempts that true friends might wish to make towards a reconciliation.

"And you are welcome, dear," said Edith, soothingly, for she saw that Isabel was in no state to bear reproach or remonstrance. "Why have you not taken off that heavy mantle, and why has not Matty brought you some refreshment? However, we will take care of you ourselves now we are come. Sit down, Isabel; or stay—I dare say you would like to come with me to my room. I will take you up-stairs at once."

But instead of responding to the invitation, Mrs. Haughton sank back wearily into the position in which she had been when her friends entered the room, saying, "I ought to tell you—for it may be of consequence to you—I have left my husband, and I mean never to return to him again. I come to you for shelter till I can make arrangements for the future. Now, if you would rather not receive me for a short time, you have but to say so, and I will make my way to the first hotel in the neighbourhood. Think well what you do, for any countenance shown to me in this emergency will seriously exasperate Edwin, and I am not sure whether the ties of a long-established friendship will have any weight against the extreme displeasure he will certainly entertain."

"We will talk of these things presently," replied Edith; "for to-night, certainly, you have no alternative; you must remain with us. So come now with me; or would you rather remain here till bed-time?"

"I will stay here. Edith, I always told you I should do something very rash, very wrong, when you were gone away; and you see I have done it. I know I had better have been patient, but I could not. I tried not to care; I tried to amuse myself in my own way, and leave events to shape themselves as they pleased; and for a while I managed to go on quietly, till at length things grew to such a pass that I could bear them no longer. I need not weary you with a long stupid story; I will only say, I, as mistress of my own house, made certain requisite arrangements, which cost me some amount of care and pains; they were no sooner made than my husband, as usual, influenced by Estelle, found fault with everything I had planned, and desired that various changes might be immediately effected; in short, my schemes were to be laid aside and *hers* adopted. I grew restive—as who would not, under such shameful provocation?—and declared that I would alter nothing and concede nothing. Mr. Haughton insisted, and I was only firmer than before; at last he said that, come what might, he would not be baffled, I *should* yield. I told him that I would never give way; that I knew he could, if he chose, triumph, by carrying the day with a strong hand; but that if he succeeded in overthrowing the plans I had formed, I would never plan or execute aught else as mistress of Redcliffe House. He laughed at me, and answered that I had said the same thing many times before. So once again I assured him I was in earnest, and plainly told him he must choose at once between Estelle's wishes and mine; for I would no longer give way to one who ought to have been driven from the house long ago."

"And what did Mr. Haughton say?"

"He was angry, not violently so, but coolly and sarcastically, as he always is when I am excited, and he said I might do as I liked, but that his resolution was settled, and he should immediately give orders, which were the very reverse of those I had already issued. I dared him to do so; and then Estelle came in, and I flashed out, and told her what I thought of her conduct, and much more than I really thought, for I spared her not at all. And she, taken by sur-

prise, was really astonished, for I have kept silence now on the old grievance for many a month, and she began to weep, and to appeal to Edwin for redress. This seemed the climax of the whole; in my very presence she appealed to my own husband against myself, entreating him to protect her from so much insult, and declaring that, unless I retracted my unjust accusations, she would instantly leave the house."

"She could not do better," said Edith, with a very faint hope of such a sequel to poor Isabel's painful story. "I hope she is gone."

"No, indeed! I said I would retract nothing; though indeed, Edith, some things I said were, I know, perfectly unjust, and what no woman would ever forgive; and she turned to Edwin and declared she would not stay another hour under a roof where she was exposed to suspicions so unfounded and so injurious; and he—he actually desired me to beg her pardon. I told him I would rather die than humble myself to her; and—it is of no use going over the whole matter—it finished by my assuring him that I would leave the house if he persisted in giving the orders, and carrying out the plans, which were to counteract those already given by myself. He only laughed insultingly, and said I might go if I liked, and remain away as long as I pleased; I was quite welcome to go when, where, and in whatever style I chose, and the less said about it the better; but if I remained in my proper place I must certainly apologize to Estelle for the insults cast upon her."

"And what said Miss Drummond?"

"O, she said if I would only retract my unjust accusations she would ask no more. She wanted no apology; I was her dear cousin, and she knew my warm temper and excitable disposition, and she could make allowances. Think of her telling me that, Edith, in my own house! And she spoke so gently, and looked so ingenuous, that I am quite sure any stranger, suddenly appearing on the arena, would have adjudged her cause to be the just one. I refused to say another word, and so we parted; but in a few hours I found that Edwin had kept his promise. The servants had orders to

undo all they had done under my supervision, and to begin afresh on an entirely new plan. So I kept my word. I too could be firm. I said nothing to my maid; I threw a few things together, ordered the carriage to Lime-street, took my ticket, slept in Birmingham last night, and came on by the North-Western Railway this morning; and here I am."

Philip looked sadly discomposed; Edith scarcely knew what to say; and Isabel herself, having stated the case, seemed entirely exhausted, and ready to faint, or lapse into violent hysterics, to which she was constitutionally liable. It was of no use to blame her, or to reason with her; Philip could only help her to the sofa, while Edith loosened her dress, chafed her hands, and administered such restoratives as were needful. And when the hysterical symptoms subsided, exhaustion followed, and there was nothing to be done but to summon Matty, and get her to bed as fast as could be. It was past twelve o'clock, when Edith, feeling quite worn out, and looking nearly as pale as her guest, came down again to the drawing-room, where Philip still sat, lost in meditations, that were apparently of very unpleasing character.

"What is to be done?" he asked impatiently, as Edith sank down into her usual seat. "Why in the world did you tell her to come here? You might have known she would run away some day."

"Indeed, I did not know, Philip: I never for a moment thought of such a thing. But we need not distress ourselves so very much; we cannot help it, and we should be brutes to refuse her shelter and sympathy under circumstances so peculiarly trying; still it is not pleasant to be mixed up in an affair of this kind. I cannot think there should ever be any interference between married people. Shall you write to Edwin to-morrow?"

"I don't know—yes, I suppose I must. Edith, I would give anything if this had never occurred. Haughton is abominably in the wrong, I am convinced; but in my circumstances it will never do to displease him. He could ruin me if he took it into his head to do so."

"Ruin you?" faintly replied Edith. "Are there still such

relations between you? I thought the debt was nearly if not quite cancelled?"

Philip covered his face with his hands, and groaned in spirit. Edith sat silent and trembling, longing yet dreading to hear his answer; at last he said, "My dear, I would rather not give you a share of my anxieties, since you cannot in any way help to set matters straight; but the truth is, both Anderson and myself have been, I am afraid, a couple of fools! This business in which we have embarked, and which we cannot now throw up if we would, is too much for us. We have not sufficient capital, therefore we do everything at disadvantage. It is in vain that I strain every nerve, and work as you know I do from early morning to midnight; it is in vain that I deny myself rest and recreation. The business improves undoubtedly, and will improve; but the question is, whether we shall be able to work it, with our present resources, till it becomes of itself a success. No tongue can tell the harass of carrying out such a business as ours with insufficient capital. If only we had been content with something less; but even now Robert's ambition seems unchecked, and he would incur fresh liabilities, and enter on new and untried fields of speculation, that may or may not become profitable. We are not in a position to undertake anything the success of which is problematical; and only this morning he forwarded to me plans and proposals for publishing various works which *may* bring in, as he expects, golden returns, or may prove an utter failure. Even did they succeed, I am not sure that we should be much the better; for the outlay would be tremendous, and we have not the money at command. It would be so long before any clear profit could be secured, that we should be exposing ourselves to certain harassing inconveniences, and very uncertain and distant benefits. It is all very well for wealthy houses like M——, and N——, and S—— to run such fearful risks. If the thing fails they lose certainly, but they can bear it; one unprofitable venture scarcely embarrasses, and certainly will not ruin them. With us the case is altogether different. O Edith, I am so weary of it all!"

The sight of Philip's depression roused Edith at once: though her heart failed her as he spoke, she would not let him see it. She came to his side instantly, feeling that there was her place, even in the first moments of her husband's distress and uncertainty; and with the pain she could not but feel at the sight of his trouble, and at the revelation just made, there was a positive thrill of pleasure at finding that he no longer excluded her from his confidence, that he told her all, and looked to her for sympathy and counsel.

"Philip, dear," she said, and her voice took all, and more than all, its old sweetness and tenderness, "I am glad you have told me this, because whatever may betide I can help you to bear it; and perhaps—who knows?—two heads are proverbially better than one: we may be able, between us, to devise something that will, in some measure, relieve us of our responsibilities. I do not know if my judgment be worth anything, when it comes to reach downright business decisions; but I am quite sure that it will be better for you if you tell me all your difficulties and explain all your anxieties: even if I can afford no solid help, it will do you good."

"You are right, my darling. Trouble is like any other burden; what weighs one person to the earth may be borne by two: already I feel rested and soothed through speaking to you. O, Edie, how I pity those men who *cannot* communicate their cares and distresses to their wives!"

"I suppose there are such cases: there are women who would only increase their husband's trouble by weak lamentation, or, worse still, by blaming him for what was already irretrievable."

"Indeed there are: Mrs. Etherington was telling me of such a case only the other day; the husband failed, his wife being quite unprepared for the catastrophe, and everybody pitied her accordingly; whereas it was her own morose disposition, her habit of reproach, and her general tendency to dolorous predictions, that caused his silence; and the pity was really due to the unfortunate husband, who had to struggle for months with all kinds of miserable harasses and incertitudes, without any relief, any sympathy, or any strength in

the quarter whence he had the most right to expect it. If wives would have the full confidence of their husbands they must merit it: no man cares to communicate a probable disaster to a woman who will immediately throw up her hands, dissolve into tears, or into fretful lamentations, as the case may be, and exclaim that she has always 'expected it would come to this.' How I do hate those sagacious people who never come in contact with a misfortune they have not all along foreseen!"

"Yes, and it is so remarkable that misfortunes are all they do foresee; prosperity arrives sometimes, but of that they never seem to have had previsions. Certainly there is nothing in the world more exasperating than to be told, when you are just smarting under some painful dispensation, 'I always knew it would come to this.' Still, I suppose one may err by looking always to the bright side. I will talk that matter over with our new friends the Heathcotes and Mrs. Etherington some day."

"Of course one may be too sanguine; when there is a heavy thunder-cloud on the horizon it is of no use to set forth on the mere strength of *hoping* the evening may prove fair and bright. But in a reasonable way, I think, one should always take things by the smooth handle; and if there are two sides to an event, as there generally are, I believe it is best and wisest to choose the side on which some sunbeams rest."

"More than that, my dear Philip, it is *right*. It is vain to talk about resignation to God's will, and at the same time go about with a melancholy countenance from which every ray of hope has fled. What is the use of saying,—

'Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me,'

if we murmur at the portion, and darken the social atmosphere around us by our unlovely conduct under the trial which has overtaken us? I think Christians may do more harm in this way than in any other."

"I suppose, my dear, the right way then is to prepare for the worst that may betide, but to look for and to hope for the best?"

"I suppose so; and even if the worst come to pass it will be sure to have some sweetness, some brightness, if received as the cross imposed for good by a kind and all-wise Father. There are few deserts, if any, where the oasis may not be be found; few dusty road-sides where there are no flowers; few nights without a single star."

"To you, Edith, it may be so; but with me it must be far otherwise: you have the secret of strength, I have it not. You walk in the light of heaven's own sunshine; I go on my way with no better illumination around my path than the torches and lamps of earth, which any storm may extinguish."

Joy unutterable filled Edith's heart; she was kneeling now by her husband, her arms clasped tightly round him, and her face hidden from his gaze. O, it was much to hear him say that he felt the weakness and the darkness that had so long been upon him, unconfessed and unfelt! She could welcome any pain, any care, if only it made him long for that rest which none can attain who cling to this world as their only portion. Were her prayers for her husband going to be answered, and just when her faith had almost failed her, just when she began to fear that he would never, never, till too late, care for those things on which depended his everlasting peace? It was almost too much; she forgot her weariness, her distress about Isabel, her cares on their own account, and happy tears streamed down her pale cheeks, and at last she whispered, "O, my dear husband, if you are indeed grieving that you lack strength and light, turn to Him who is a Rock of strength, and an everlasting Sun and Glory! Only come to Him who calls you, who is waiting for you, and all will be well; come what will, we shall be happy."

Then there was silence in the quiet room; the great city was hushed to sleep at last, and there was no murmur of voices, and no sounds of busy footsteps treading below; only on the still air of the calm spring night came the mighty voice from the cathedral—"the iron tongue of time"—telling the watchers far and near that the new day was born, and the hours fast speeding on, while the tired world was still clasped in the kindly arms of balmy slumber. Philip sat quite still,

shading his eyes with one hand, the other was on his wife's shoulder; and she was yet kneeling by his side, sending up many a voiceless, but fervent prayer, and in the same breath thanking God, who had so far granted her heart's desire. Yes, it must be so; the icy crust was melting away; Philip knew his need, and deplored it; surely, ere long, he would be yearning to lay hold on the promise.

"Philip," she said, at length, "how long have you felt so? Was it something Mr. Heathcote said this evening?"

"No, darling, not this evening; it was some days ago. I was correcting one of his proofs; it was one of his sermons on the text, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,' &c.; and I cannot tell how I was, but the words seemed written for me alone. Then Mr. Heathcote himself came in, and spoke on the same subject; he spoke of everlasting joy and peace, and the blessedness of serving God even in this life; and his face was so sweet and bright, Edie—I never saw a look like it on any face before; I could not but feel how he entirely realized it all; and I—I felt so far away from him, from you, from all the saints of God. But, dearest, it is past two o'clock, and you are sadly wearied; let us go to bed; I must be down again by six."

"Yes, indeed, and you were up early this morning; let us go. God bless that dear Mr. Heathcote! May the crown which he will wear in the day of his Lord's appearing, sparkle with many precious gems, and you among them, my Philip, brightest and fairest of them all!"

And Philip responded, tenderly and reverently, "God bless dear Mr. Heathcote!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRESH DISASTER.

It was late next morning when Edith woke up and found, to her astonishment, that Philip was still soundly asleep by her side. Such a thing as Mr. Proctor prolonging his slumbers to nearly eight o'clock—except, indeed, on Sunday mornings—had never been heard of for many and many a month; and, when at last roused by his wife, he sprang up in extreme dismay, lamenting his lost time, that no extra diligence could possibly replace. "He ought to have done a good two hours' work by this time," he said; and vigorously he scolded himself for sleeping and taking his ease, when he should have been getting on with the business of the day, already retarded by the unwonted indulgence of last night's visit.

"I think it is very excusable," said Edith, presently, "for after all, it is not so very long since we came to bed: I feel only half rested; but I hope Isabel is not down-stairs waiting for her breakfast; I have not been so late myself since the beginning of March."

The name of Isabel recalled to Philip's mind all his troubles, and he sighed heavily: with every kind feeling towards Mrs. Haughton, and with all hospitable intentions, he wished most sincerely she was under any roof but his. What would Edwin say at their sheltering his fugitive wife? for such poor Isabel really was. Then he tried to think how he should feel disposed towards any one who might seem to countenance Edith in a similar proceeding; but there he was obliged to stop; his imagination was really unequal to such a flight of fancy; the bare idea of Edith running away was so positively ridiculous and unnatural—sooner might Paternoster-row take flight from

Ave-Maria-lane. But notwithstanding the grim chuckle in which he privately indulged at the absurd notion of his own wife eloping with her own self as Mrs. Haughton had done, his perplexity remained undiminished; indeed, the broad daylight, and the work-a-day aspect of everything around him, seemed to increase tenfold the uneasiness under which he laboured. O, if that unlucky Isabel had only sought some other haven of refuge! And then he thought of Estelle, and wondered why there was no law by which women so dangerous and so designing might be apprehended, tried by jury, and sentenced to solitary confinement, and interminable stocking-mending. But all these thoughts he kept to himself, only replying to his wife's remark, "O! no fear of Mrs. Haughton being down yet: it is one of the capital crimes brought against her by Edwin, and sweetly deplored by Estelle, that she persists in getting up just in time for luncheon. I dare say it is now about the middle of her night."

"Ah! but when she is restless she rises early enough; you have no idea what an excitable creature she is!"

"Haven't I? You mistake, Mrs. Proctor. O! why did those two ever marry? When I encountered Edwin in Meyer's shop, buying the wedding-ring, my heart misgave me. He spoke of her so lightly; he jested so carelessly—almost coarsely, I thought then—about his approaching marriage; he seemed not to have the slightest conception of the real beauty, or the responsibility, or the true sanctities of the married life. If he had not been my friend—the friend of early days—I should have taken a dislike to him on the spot."

"Nevertheless, they might have ended in understanding each other, had they been left alone. With all her faults, Isabel is so loving, so generous, so thoroughly ingenuous, that I think she must eventually have taken her right place in her husband's regard, if only she had ever had a fair chance."

"I don't know; a thoroughly undisciplined woman's nature must be very difficult to deal with—a positive infliction."

"Especially if dealt with by a man's thoroughly undisciplined nature. My dear, I begin to think it is an unspeakable

privilege to bear the yoke in one's youth; there is, I am convinced, no greater misfortune than being left to follow out the selfish dictates and the mistaken impulses of an undisciplined youth. Sooner or later the discipline comes, and the will that has known no curb, the caprices that have never been restrained, must find the chastening very grievous, and doubly hard to bear. The later the discipline the more painful it must be."

"Exactly. Well, Edie, let us comfort ourselves by thinking how much discipline we have had, from our childhood upwards. Mine was a loveless, neglected boyhood, a struggling, unaided youth; and I had plenty of that charming dish commonly called humble-pie. Ah, well! if humble-pie be not exactly palatable, it is certainly—when taken in moderation—wholesome and strengthening. Shall you leave Isabel to protracted slumbers, or shall you go and see how she has passed the night?"

"Go and see how she is, I think: you know she was very unwell last evening; and excitement is sometimes very dangerous to a nervous, impressible temperament like hers."

So in a few minutes Edith found herself in her guest's chamber. Isabel was still in bed, her magnificent black hair strewn all over the pillow, her dark eyes glittering, and her cheeks crimson with fever; it seemed a mockery to ask her how she had rested.

"O, Edith," she began, as soon as she saw her friend, "I have had such a miserable night, and such fearful dreams! And, do you know, I think I must be going mad, for I go on dreaming them while I am awake. All night long I have heard that great bell tolling, tolling; and I heard the noise in the streets almost as soon as the day began to dawn; and yet I was toiling up black, slippery rocks, with precipices on either hand, and the sea, in great inky, hungry waves, was roaring below; and sometimes I slipped, and began sliding down into the dreadful gulf; and once I was on the Waterloo shore, and the tide came in and surrounded me; and a wild storm began, and shut out the coast, for I was far out on the sands, among the salt-pools, and Estelle and Edwin came by

in a gay little boat, such as there are on Windermere for pleasure-parties, and they mocked at my anguish, and would not take me in, and the waves came higher and higher, and took my breath; and then I seemed to awake, and yet the dreadful sensation remained. I think I am ill, Edith."

"I am sure you are, dear; your hands are burning, and your eyes are too bright. Be still, and try to be quiet, I will bring you some medicine, and presently you shall have some tea. I know you have no faith in homœopathy, but you shall try my globules nevertheless."

Edith went down with a very serious face, and told Philip that Isabel's appearance and rambling talk alarmed her exceedingly; she felt sure some illness was impending.

"Get out some aconite, or ignatia, or whatever suits the symptoms," said Philip, consolingly. "You will soon set her to rights, my dear. Tell Matty to fetch the book out of our room."

"I do not think she will be soon set right, Philip. Neither homœopathy, or any other pathy, can do much good in her case, I fear: however, I will try."

In half-an-hour Edith was again seeking speech of her husband. He was in his den, carefully going over some invoices. "What is it, Edie?" he cried immediately—"that luckless Isabel again?"

"O, Philip!" was Edith's answer—and she looked quite sick with apprehension—"she is so ill; do come and look at her."

"My dear, will she not be displeased at so unwarrantable an intrusion?"

"No, no! come at once, and say what is to be done. She will not know you in the least. She thinks I am Estelle—and she is talking so fast and so wildly."

"Not know me! Indeed that is very serious. I wish, my love, we were well out of this scrape. Yes, I will come with you, and if there is really anything to be apprehended we will immediately send for medical advice."

And so Philip went with Edith to Isabel's chamber. He came out again very quickly, beckoning his wife to go with

him, and looking far more serious than when he entered; indeed, his whole countenance expressed extreme consternation.

"Well?" said Edith, when they were out on the landing, where, however, through the closed door they could distinctly hear poor Isabel's wild, rambling talk.

"We must call in medical aid this moment; and as neither Mr. nor Mrs. Haughton have the slightest faith in homœopathy, it had better be an allopathic practitioner of eminence. It is sure to be a severe case, and she ought not to be treated on a system that her whole family ridicule and disavow. I will send a messenger immediately to Dr. Clinton, and I shall at once telegraph to Edwin."

"Yes; and what must I do now?"

"Nothing till the doctor comes; only keep her as cool and as quiet as you can; and if she persists in addressing you as Miss Drummond, you had better keep out of the way. Listen! poor child! she is absolutely raving. O! Edwin has much to answer for!"

"Say rather Estelle is responsible for the whole mischief."

"Not so, my dear; she is the very mischief itself—a perfect curse at any man's hearth and board; but Edwin had no right to allow her to usurp the authority and the influence which has been hers so long. Poor Isabel! what long, weary misery do those incoherent ravings disclose; but I must go. Keep yourself quiet, dearest, and don't be dismayed."

More easily said than acted upon, for Edith, in spite of her husband's words, was excessively dismayed, nor were her fears abated when Dr. Clinton arrived, for he had no consolation to offer; he could only say that the patient was young, and naturally of sound constitution; but that the nervous system had been violently excited, and her brain and temperament, always very sensitive, had been irritated to the verge of insanity. Edith felt herself in duty bound to tell the doctor the whole story of her friend's home troubles, and its consequences. Dr. Clinton shook his head: "Ah! madam!" he said, gravely; "if a few of these cases were made public, it would be very good for society. In the exercise of my profes-

sion I have known much misery, and even ruin, resulting from this very cause. Miss Drummond is one of a class who, though guiltless, as the world holds guilt, of any real indiscretion, yet largely profanes the sanctities of married life. Such a woman is to be shunned as a malaria! And if Mrs. Haughton should die—or, which is quite as probable, become a lunatic—her death, or the loss of reason, will rest at the door of this vain, heartless, unprincipled young woman. If she come in my way I shall not hesitate to tell her so; a little plain speaking, just a few wholesome trenchant truths, *may* do her good, if she be not too far gone to receive benefit or warning. Is the telegraph dispatched to my patient's husband?"

"Yes, an hour ago. Mr. Proctor sent it himself."

"Right. I hope he will be here by midnight. I shall let him know at once how slender is the thread on which his wife's life and reason depend. A man who could succumb to the flatteries and the arts of an 'Estelle,' cannot be supposed to cherish a very devoted conjugal affection. If he stagger under the shock, so much the better; blows are sometimes more serviceable than blandishments. I must leave you now, Mrs. Proctor, but I will be with you again during the afternoon, and in the meantime I will send you a competent, trustworthy nurse. Keep the sick room as cool and airy as possible."

And so Dr. Clinton went away; and some weary hours were passed in Isabel's room, where all his directions were most scrupulously carried out. About two o'clock Matty announced the arrival of the nurse, and soon afterwards of Mrs. Etherington, who called in on some slight matter of business with her publisher. It was no small relief to Edith to go down and talk over her troubles with the friend on whose judgment and discrimination she had so much reliance.

Mrs. Etherington fully sympathized with her, and proposed taking back with her the two younger children and the nursemaid; and Edith, after a little demur, lest she should be encroaching on Mrs. Etherington's kindness, thankfully consented. Dr. Clinton had assured her that Mrs. Haughton's illness was not in the slightest degree infectious, and that no one would run the least risk in attending upon her, never-

theless it was a great comfort to have those little tramping feet, and chattering voices—for baby now was extremely loquacious, after the fashion of young gentlemen of his age—safely provided for, at a distance from the invalid. When Mrs. Etherington had heard the whole story, she said: "That of course having never witnessed any of the scenes enacted through the agency of Miss Drummond, she could not positively assure herself how much or how little blame lay to poor Isabel's charge—one thing, however, was clear, Estelle had acted cruelly, ruthlessly, and most wickedly; since nothing could excuse, nor in any way extenuate, any attempt at sinister interference between two who were united in the sacred relations of marriage. Such conduct must ever, and in all cases, deserve the severest reprehension, and lay up for itself a store of inevitable retribution in the days to come. But," said Mrs. Etherington, in conclusion, "nothing could justify the unhappy lady in leaving her husband's protection. She had pledged herself to him 'for better and for worse,' and when the worse came, it was still her wifely duty to remain at his side, and patiently endure and strive, through the might of love and meekness, to win back the affection that had once made 'the better.'"

"But there are cases," said Edith, "where a wife, a Christian wife, may lawfully leave her husband?"

"Undoubtedly there are such unhappy and extreme cases, since no rule is without its exception; but I think they are very rare; indeed, under the most aggravating circumstances, I believe I should counsel patience, and gentleness, and meek womanly fortitude, rather than rash procedure of any kind. The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is something more than ornament—it is a resistless panoply; to be clad therewith is to be invested with a dignity that rude insult cannot ruffle, to be armed with weapons that are blessed of God, as were the sling and stone of David, and that must in the end conquer triumphantly. Ah! I am sure that a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price, is not only the most costly and lovely adornment that a woman can put on, but also her surest defence, her most honourable and invincible armour."

"I quite believe you, but to wear it with a pure heart, and sincerely, one must be a saint."

"Undoubtedly, and why not? Should not all women professing godliness strive to lead a saintly life? And there is no saintliness in shutting one's self up in a convent cell, or in attending half-a-dozen religious services in the week, while home duties are slighted; but there is true saintliness in bearing cheerfully and bravely the will of God, whether that will impose the cross or the crown, in cultivating a spirit of praise, even when the clouds are darkest, and the storm at its worst, in shedding on all around an influence calm, profound, holy, and refreshing, and, above all, in loving through all things. Of such a woman it may well be said that she is a crown to her husband; and, without fail, will her children rise up and call her blessed."

"O! Mrs. Etherington, how much depends on us mothers! It seems to me that we are the instruments that make and mar the world; we are the secondary causes of all evil and of all good. Men, I believe, have not half the responsibility committed to them by God that we have, for it is we who train the men in the years when the disposition is most plastic; the soft wax is in our hands to mould very much as we will, and we leave on it indelible impressions that a life-time cannot efface. Nearly all good and great men have had good, wise, tender mothers."

"Yes, a fact that is now well established. Madame de Genlis was right, when, in answer to Napoleon's inquiry as to the best method of education which should produce truly great men and ennoble the State, she replied, 'Sire, we want a nation of *mothers*.' A few days since I saw the proof-sheets of a most valuable work that is about to appear—the life of the excellent and justly celebrated Mrs. Schimmelpenninck. In speaking of her own mother, who was indeed a most wonderful woman, referring to a time of sickness, when the maternal care and training was unavoidably suspended, and the responsibility left in the hands of hirelings, she says, 'O, what a change was this from the unalterably firm, but kind and wise, government of my mother! whose voice was always sweet,

clear, and equable, firm and deepening in solemnity like the diapason of an organ, or bright and refreshing with cheerfulness. For the twenty-eight years I lived at home I never, in voice, look, or gesture, saw in her the slightest expression of temper. This I say, not as a mode of speaking, but as an actual reality. *Her orders were precise, definite, always bearing on essential points, and wholly free from worry or petty detail;* her reproofs were grave and austere, yet mingled with sweetness, and never bestowed but on known and wilful transgression. Prompt and instant obedience she enforced, or rather it was always willingly given.' Now, I thought that paragraph deserved to be printed in letters of gold; but not being able to ensure it that distinction I copied it at once, rather irregularly I own, into my tablets."

"And quite worthy of your commendation it is. May it teach me many a lesson that may be a blessing to generations yet to come! For if God enables me to train my darlings wisely, they will probably some time, with equal care and earnestness, train children of their own, whose spheres of action may be far wider, and whose influence may be infinitely more important, than any that can fall to the lot of my husband and myself. A good old lady once told me to ponder that text—'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' And she bade me observe that it was '*will not* depart,' and by no means *may* not; thus demonstrating that if the command were to the full extent observed, the promised sequence would be the inevitable result."

"But now," said Mrs. Etherington, rising, "I ought to be on my way home; and if your little ones are ready, I should be glad to go at once. It is much later than I thought."

The children were ready, and with many embraces, and with a few tears she could not repress, Edith bade them good-bye. It was a trial of her fortitude, entirely as she trusted Mrs. Etherington; for she had never been separated from them for one half-day since their birth, and Edith was the tenderest of mammas. Then she went back to poor Isabel; and the sad hours of that long, mournful day wore slowly to

evening, and both she and Philip began to look forward to Mr. Haughton's arrival; for early in the afternoon a telegram had been received, with these words:—"Coming by next fast train." But the evening deepened into night; the roar of the great city was lulled to a gentle murmur; St. Paul's struck ten, eleven, twelve, and yet no Edwin appeared.

Philip and Edith were nearly worn out with their increasing anxiety, for Dr. Clinton's second visit had only renewed the sad impressions of the morning, and Isabel grew visibly worse, even to the inexperienced eyes of Matty. At length, when Edith had succeeded in persuading her husband to go to bed, promising to follow in two hours at the furthest, there were sounds of an arrival. Edith flew to the head of the stairs, and found herself face to face with Estelle Drummond; some steps behind came Edwin Haughton, pale, grave, and with an air of impenetrable pride and reserve.

CHAPTER XXX.

REST AT LAST.

Open-armed, Estelle Drummond flew to her hostess. "Our poor Isabel!" she cried; "is she really here, Mrs. Proctor? Is she really very ill?—what is it? O! do tell me at once!"

As quickly as was consistent with the rules of good breeding, Edith extricated herself from Estelle's unwelcome embrace, and gravely replied, "Mrs. Haughton *is* here, and I fear most dangerously ill; indeed, her medical attendant warns us that the very worst is to be apprehended." By this time they were standing together in the drawing-room, and Edwin Haughton was receiving Philip's greeting, with an air of mingled nervousness and haughtiness. He looked round quickly as Edith uttered the last words, and his lips turned to ashy paleness: did he really hear her aright?

Yes! Philip repeated the words; and the sad, serious countenances of Mr. and Mrs. Proctor told him more forcibly than their words even, how much they feared, and how deep had been their anxieties for many hours. For a minute there was unbroken silence. Philip and Edith were both too wearied, and too angry, to say much to their guests; Edwin was filled with consternation; but Estelle, who had seated herself in Edith's rocking-chair, and who was looking as serene and as animated as though she had not just been summoned to what might be her cousin's deathbed, and as graceful and interesting as though she had not just come off a long journey in the middle of the night, coolly remarked, "It was just like poor dear Isabel, rushing away in that wild, impulsive style, and then working herself into a perfect frenzy; and so ill-judged, so very *wrong*, indeed, one might say."

This was too much for Edith's equanimity, and she made answer immediately—"Mrs. Haughton had singular provocation, Miss Drummond; indeed, considering that impulsiveness which you have always deplored, I wonder that this most unfortunate step was not taken long ago. But this is not a time to debate the imprudence of any act of Isabel's; since it will very likely be her last. I, for my part, can only deeply regret that she, with her sensitive feelings and her impetuous disposition, should have been driven to so cruel an alternative. Miss Drummond! should Dr. Clinton's expectations be verified —should your cousin die, or recover only with impaired intellect, you will have much to answer for."

Philip was astonished at Edith's quiet, dignified courage; and Estelle herself was perfectly confounded; she had not expected to have so serious a charge thrust home upon her without preface, and without circumlocution; and a horrible suspicion awoke within her, that there was *truth* in the charge thus laid to her account. What if Isabel really died, and what if the world laid the blame at her door? and then the world was never very charitable, under any circumstances, and it would surely assert much that was false, accuse her of that of which she was entirely innocent; and what would become of her? Her influence, her character even, her position

in society would be lost for ever! And a great dread of possible retribution fell on Estelle's heart, as she sat there in the presence of Isabel's friends, and Isabel's husband; and her soft pink colour faded, and her rosy lips paled, while she said, in a tone of forced sweetness and calmness, "Mrs. Proctor, you are unjust; I know you never liked me; you hated me from the very beginning of our acquaintance."

"I never hated you, Miss Drummond. Yes; I did once for a little while, when you came for a brief space between my husband and myself; but I prayed God to make me love *my own* enemy, and he heard my prayer."

"I—your enemy, Mrs. Proctor!" was Estelle's ready exclamation; but in her heart she knew well what her hostess meant, and conscience, so long lulled, so long silenced, persisted now in speaking and in being heard. But Edith went on as though the interpolation had not occurred. "But when you say I never liked you, you are right. I could not like you. I saw very soon to what your conduct tended; under the mask of friendship you betrayed Isabel into weaknesses, into faults, to which her ardent and generous temperament was constitutionally liable; then you bewailed those defects in the presence of her husband; you made remarks that proved, or that were intended to prove, your own superior sense, your calmer judgment, your more considerate behaviour. You flattered Mr. Haughton in every way, you deferred to him, asked his advice, studied his wishes, sided with him in every argument, and so, as time went on, and your influence grew and deepened, you committed the crime of severing those whom God had joined together in the holiest of bonds. You know that what I say is truth; you know that you have done all this, and infinitely more of which I am not cognizant; and now your work draws near its completion: a few more days, perhaps a few more hours, and Isabel will no longer be at your mercy."

Estelle burst into tears;—the bare, naked truth was horrible, hideous! But *it was the truth*, and it might not be evaded. While Edith spoke, the flimsy veil of pretences, with which she had beguiled even her own soul, was torn away—

conscience would speak, would shriek in her ears the countless evil-doings of the last six years. Her vanity, her greed of admiration, her lust of power—nay, of pre-eminence—her heartlessness, her refined cruelty, stood up before her, like so many spectres of the past—a ghastly throng, gibing, and scorning, and menacing—a throng that has appalled many a stout heart, and shaken many an adamantine will—those pale, awful, inexorable spectres of past and unrepented guilt. No wonder that Estelle Drummond quailed before that terrible array of her own littlenesses, her own sins.

The silence was broken by Edwin begging Edith to lead him to Isabel's chamber. And Edith rose, and took him thither at once; for there was no question now of preparing the invalid for his appearance. Could her dead father and mother have risen from their grave, and passed before her, there would have been no surprise, no recognition. Little more than senseless clay lay on that bed; the soul was far away in the awful and fantastic regions of delirium. And presently Edwin Haughton stood by the bedside, and saw the form that he had sworn to cherish with all truth and tenderness, lying there, changed—O, how terribly changed, since he had seen it last, proud, beautiful, defiant, and writhing under his own exasperating scorn! Her rich black tresses had been shorn away several hours before, and ice had been applied to the burning head, that tossed so wearily on the pillows; the face was shrunken and pinched already, the lips were parched, the eyes unnaturally bright, and so wild, or else so vacant; and two large spots of the deepest crimson glowed like fire on the once beautifully-rounded cheeks. It seemed the wreck of Isabel, and not herself, that he beheld.

Then she began to talk quickly and incoherently. She was living over again the long-forgotten past—now she was a child again, in her father's home, roaming through the pleasant fields of Speke, talking to her only brother, who had died long ago in a foreign land, or gathering flowers with her French governess, or playing with her little dog, the pet and darling of her childish heart. And then she was once more a gay, careless girl, under her uncle's protection, and Edwin was her

lover, and the *beau-idéal* of all that was noble, and bright, and chivalric; and then came the days of her early wedded life, and she poured forth, again and again, the trust, and love, and proud admiration that filled her young heart. And Mr. Haughton covered his face and groaned aloud; for he recognized, as he had sometimes dimly done before, the strength and purity of Isabel's nature, the qualities that he, as her husband, might have wrought into something most fair, most good, most loveable, and most matchless: and now, now she was dying: the man whom she ever and anon addressed with such infinite tenderness, such wifely trust and pride, was by her side and she knew it not, or if she had known it she would perhaps have shrunk away in dread and alienation. O, Estelle had cruelly, wickedly belied that noble, though faulty, creature; but on himself lay the weight of blame—the unendurable onus of guilt and vain regret. Why had he listened to her flattering tongue? Why had he allowed her at the very first, when the seeds of the deadly mischief were scarcely sown, to discuss his wife's character?—to expatiate, however kindly, as it seemed, however pathetically, on his wife's failings? Why had he allowed her to gain over him such strange, inexplicable sway? Why had he always listened to her in preference to Isabel? Had he been mad, or foolish, or wicked, or unfortunate, or all these combined? He scarcely knew; but he would have given all he possessed to have blotted out the errors of his married life, and to begin again with Isabel's generous nature unwarped, her love and faith unimpaired, and no Estelle to come between them with her arts and her witcheries, and her plausible representations. And presently Estelle herself came in and stood near him, and with an irrepressible shudder of loathing he moved further away, for the mere touch of her wide silken skirt seemed to fill him with aversion and repugnance; and she, with her quick, intuitive perceptions, divined at once his feeling towards her: and she knew that her power over Edwin Haughton had suddenly died out, nevermore to revive in the slightest degree.

And so many days passed on, and the battle between life

and death grew sterner and fiercer; more and more piteous was the scene, more and more hopeless the result, and Edwin began to feel indeed that his tardy love and tenderness were all too late. A tithe of the care and the affection now lavished on that senseless, fading form, given in earlier days, and all this misery, this agony had never been. "Too late, too late," was always the cry of his aching, remorseful spirit; and "too late" was the thought of others in that sad, yet busy, city house—too late for all save pardon and the peace of the world to come. And in some hearts there were mournful whispers that it might be too late for that even.

At length came the hour when the delirium ceased: it was the middle of the night, and Edith and the nurse were the sole watchers: indeed, Edith alone might be said to be keeping watch over her dying friend, for the nurse, worn out with fatigue, had sunk into a deep, though uneasy, slumber, and Edith was glad to leave her undisturbed, that a little sleep might recruit her fast-failing forces.

She was sitting near the window trying to read, for there was nothing to be done, only from time to time to administer cordials to the sinking invalid, when she became aware of a quiet movement in the bed, and a low voice, that sounded calmer and clearer than it had ever done before. Edith was at her friend's side in a moment, and she saw at once that the delirium was past, and that Reason had regained her throne, but on the pallid brow and sunken features was the unmistakeable impress of death.

"Edie, dear," said poor Isabel, faintly, "I am in London, am I not, in your house?"

"Yes, darling, and you have been very ill; I thought you would never speak to me again. Hush! you must have some wine and water, and then I will tell you all about it."

"Edie, do you know, I thought I saw my husband? All last night, I thought he was sitting by me on that chair; sometimes he was looking at me so mournfully, and sometimes he had buried his face in his hands; but, at last, I looked and he was gone, and Mr. Proctor was there talking to you, and then I knew I had made a mistake; it was only one of my

dreams, the pleasantest of them all, for some have been so horrible—O, so unspeakably horrible!"

"My poor Isabel! You have been delirious, my love; and you know every one passes through some kind of horror in delirium. But Isabel, if it should not be a delirious fancy about Mr. Haughton—if he were really here, should you be sorry?"

"O, no! And yet he must be very angry, Edie; I remember it all now; I have been very wrong; I ran away from my husband; I tried to think I hated him; but I did not really, you know; it was all my pride and my temper; and yet I was tried, tried very hard indeed. O, Edie! only God knows what bitter trials I have had! But I should have been patient; there is great strength in patience, I have heard good people say. *Is* Edwin here?"

"Yes. We sent for him; he came the moment he heard of your illness."

"And—is he dreadfully angry, Edith? Tell me the exact truth."

"No, not angry in the least, dear. He is in great grief about you; he is almost worn out with anxiety. All will be right now, dear Isabel; he is only waiting for you to forgive him. Now, take this draught, and then I will fetch him."

Obediently as a child Isabel took the potion; but it was pitiable to see her weakness; and, now that the flush of fever was quite gone, the wan features, and the ashy pallor of the shrunken face, seemed already meetening for their last long sleep.

Edwin came at Edith's summons, and he and Isabel were left alone. What passed between the husband and wife, in that solemn hour of re-union and reconciliation, no one ever knew; when Edith came back Edwin still sat by the bedside, clasping fast in his own the little thin hand, that had no strength to return the pressure. The exhaustion of bitter grief, of unavailing remorse, was visible on his countenance; Isabel's face was peaceful as the last smile of a July sunset.

She beckoned to Edith to come close, for her voice had sunk to a mere whisper, and now and then her breath went and

came in little quick gasps. "It is all right," she said, in a faint but clear tone; "Edwin has forgiven me quite; and he *does* love me, I am sure of it now. And, Edie, I want to see Estelle; I am not afraid of her any longer; and I must forgive her, and ask her to forgive me for the false charges that, in my mad anger, I brought against her. Will you fetch her?"

"Can you bear it?" was Edith's anxious demand.

"No, no! do not think of it," interposed Edwin; "let her pass from our sight and from our memory for ever, my Isabel."

"Please, dear, let me see her; I must be friends with her. O, Edwin, I am going to meet the great God, and I cannot ask him to forgive me while I am not at peace with any one. She has been my cruel enemy, and I must forgive her all, and bless her, and pray for her; and then I can pray for myself—not till then." And so Estelle came, unwillingly enough, and stood like a guilty thing, as she was, by the side of her whose young life she had overshadowed, and embittered, and at last brought to an untimely end. She did not speak; she could not meet the meek supplicating glances of those soft dark eyes; she waited till Isabel should address her.

"Cousin Estelle!" said Isabel, at last, "I have quite forgiven you; you made me very unhappy, and you made me —only I ought to have been stronger—you made me do many wrong things. And now I forgive you with all my heart: it is as though it had never been. Can you forgive me? for I said many wicked things; in my passion I accused you of sins of which I even then knew you were innocent even in thought! I wronged you greatly, Estelle; will you forgive me?"

"Don't ask *me* to forgive you," burst out Estelle quite wildly; "it is a mockery, a mere mockery; you could not say more than I deserved; I was the misery of your life: but for me you would have been a happy wife; and now—now, if you die, I shall have murder on my soul!"

"Not so, Estelle; do not talk so wildly. It was the will of God that I should have such discipline; and I should have

been more patient, more gentle. It was my own undisciplined heart that gave the keenest edge to my sufferings."

Early in the forenoon of the next day Mr. Heathcote was announced; and Edith was anxious that he should see Isabel, who was rapidly sinking. He came in and sat down, while Edith explained who he was, and how anxious to be of use to her. She smiled very faintly, and tried to put out her hand; then she looked up into his face, that with all its earnestness, and strength, and pitying tenderness was regarding hers, on which rested so visibly the seal of the last enemy. The mild gaze of those deep loving eyes seemed to reassure her; she recognized instinctively the aspect of one whose life was hidden with Christ in God, whose joy was to do his Master's work, whose hope was strong and broad as the great eternity itself. "I am going away very fast!" she murmured.

"Yes," the minister replied, "going from a world of change and sorrow to the land where there are no shadows, no mutabilities. Is it going *home*, dear Mrs. Haughton?"

"Yes, I think so," she answered, quietly. "I have been a poor, weak, wayward creature; I have lived twenty-seven years, and I have wasted them all; my sins are many and grievous, but I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I throw myself upon Him. He will receive me, will He not?"

"Surely, most surely," was the emphatic answer; "the Lord Jesus never turned away one who came to Him in humble dependence and child-like faith; cling to Him and He will stretch out His arms and hold you fast till the vale of Death is passed, and face to face you see Him who washed away your sins in His own blood, and presented you faultless before His Father's throne."

"Do you know," she said, presently, "Jesus Christ has taught me so much? Edith used to talk to me, but now it seems as if it were Jesus Christ Himself. How good of Him to come at last, when I can no longer hope to do anything for Him, when I have so long refused to hear Him, and offended Him so often. There is none like Him—no! none! I have been trying to remember one of Edith's hymns, but I cannot —'Cling to the Crucified!'"

But Mr. Heathcote remembered it well; it was one of the Songs of Faith and Hope that he prized greatly. Slowly he repeated the lines:—

'Cling to the Crucified!
His death is life to thee—
Life for eternity.
His pains thy pardon seal,
His stripes thy bruises heal,
His cross proclaims thy peace,
Bids every sorrow cease.
His blood is all to thee,
It purges thee from sin;
It sets thy spirit free,
It keeps thy conscience clean.
Cling to the Crucified!

Cling to the Crucified!
His is a heart of love,
Full as the hearts above;
Its depths of sympathy
Are all awake for thee;
His countenance is light
Even in the darkest night.
That love shall never change,
That light shall ne'er grow dim;
Charge thou thy faithless heart
To find its all in Him.
Cling to the Crucified!"

When the calm voice ceased, there was silence in the room, while without, the great tide of London life rolled on busily, loudly, and interminably as ever. So in this world mingle ever, life and death, the actual and spiritual, the seen and the unseen. Isabel's cares were over; she had committed her child to a father who she felt sure would now treat him wisely and tenderly, were it only for his poor mother's sake; she would fain have pressed a farewell kiss on the rosy lips, but that might not be; it was her own fault that he was absent, for when she left her husband she left her child; so she sent him her blessing, and a message that he would understand some day, when childhood was past, and youth fairly entered upon. Estelle was forgiven; her husband's arms were supporting her; her best friends were around her; one of God's

faithful ministers was at her side. And so with closed eyes she lay, scarcely breathing and yet suffering no pain and little struggle, till Edwin Haughton felt that only soulless clay rested in the arms that gave their support and protection all too late. One word only she murmured at the last—"Rest!"

And Edith answered—"Yes!—rest at last!"

And when the evening sun shone into the quiet room, its dying rays rested on a silent, shrouded form, all that was mortal of the fair, warm-hearted Isabel Haughton. And wave upon wave rolled the great tumult of the streets below—Life, with all its burdens, and sins, and griefs, and cares, and rejoicings: in the peaceful chamber above—Death, and perfect repose; rest, soft and sweet, undisturbed till the resurrection morning.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION.

They laid poor Isabel to rest in Kensal-green Cemetery; and then, and not till then, did Edwin Haughton speak to Estelle of the past and of the future. The day after the funeral, after she herself had spoken of returning to Redcliffe House, he sought a private interview with her, and told her at once, and succinctly, that they two must never meet again.

Estelle turned scarlet, and then pale: her first emotions were of pain and shame; her second, of defiance and anger. "So be it," she said, proudly. "Had you not spoken, I should have made immediate preparations for leaving Redcliffe House; of course I knew that, under existing circumstances, it could not, with propriety, be my home any longer."

"It is not a mere question of propriety," he replied, gravely; "it is best to speak plainly: I meant certainly that we could not again live under one roof, but I meant more

than that—I wish that we may never see each other, never speak with each other, after to-day, any more in this world."

"Certainly, your wish shall be respected," she returned, with considerable hauteur; "but, considering our long and close intimacy, it is a wish that one would hardly have expected."

"It is on account of that very intimacy, so fatally close, so unfortunately long, that I desire a complete severation of all plans, arrangements, and associations. Estelle! when I think of my own guilt towards my poor sacrificed Isabel I can scarcely blame you; and yet you are fearfully to blame—you know it, and you have confessed it."

"It may be so," was Estelle's proud answer; "but it does not come gracefully from your lips, Edwin Haughton." And then, changing her tone—"I do admit that I acted wrongly towards my cousin Isabel; I was probably mistaken in my estimate of her character; but I did what seemed to me, under the circumstances, just and right, and if I erred, it was on your account; I saw at once that there was a void in your heart that she never could, never did fill. You were my kind, generous guardian; I wished your happiness."

"And what concern of yours was my happiness?" he interrupted, almost fiercely; "I deny the truth of your assertions. When I married, and for weeks afterwards, Isabel was all the world to me; if we had been left alone, if *you* had never stood between us with your arts and your—your witcheries, we might have clashed sometimes. With two such wayward, undisciplined natures as ours, it was inevitable. But, as time passed on, those natures would, as a matter of necessity, have assimilated more and more; I should have recognized my wife's fervent, generous temper; she would have learned to concede some things; our child would have linked us yet more firmly, and we should have been happy. You stepped in, Estelle: you were like the serpent in Paradise; but for you I might not this day be overwhelmed with anguish and remorse: but for you, my poor lost Isabel might still have been blooming and happy, and a beloved wife and a rejoicing mother."

"Ungrateful! ungenerous!" murmured Estelle; the tears swimming in her deep blue eyes, which were fixed with pathetic reproach on Edwin's stern cold face. He felt that those magnetic eyes were turned full upon his, with that wistful, beseeching expression in their azure depths that he knew but too well—the very pleading, wistful look that had so often gained the day when she and Isabel were in any way at issue, and he called upon to be umpire. He had been used to think those glances so sweetly feminine, so fascinating, so resistless, and now he could not meet them without a shudder; they brought back, with overwhelming force and vividness, the wretched, irrevocable past; and they proved Estelle to be unchanged, still playing off with considerable skill and tact the petty artillery that had served her purpose so well in the days that were gone.

He looked coldly away, and answered, "Perhaps I am ungenerous, Estelle; but so much the better, since we are to part; I do not wish you to think kindly of me; from this day let there be between us two a great gulf, impassable for all time! And now let me say two things: in the first place, Redcliffe House is open to you till you have completed every arrangement for your own comfort and well-being. I need not say I shall not be there. I have sent for my boy, and I shall take him to Brighton, or Hastings, or elsewhere, immediately. Secondly, I conjure you to alter your mode of conduct; if, as I believe is the case, the admiration and devotion of the opposite sex is absolutely necessary to your happiness, be content, I pray you, with playing the coquette with unmarried men. Involve them in your toils if you will; there are always plenty of fools who will willingly enslave themselves for the sake of a pretty, silver-tongued woman; be content with such conquests. It is a paltry sort of life to lead, certainly, and somewhat degrading; even the fools themselves, who play the fly to the fascinating spider, are apt to confess that unpalatable truth sometimes. Men may glory for a while in wearing the chains of a lovely, vain coquette, but they seldom care—seldom dare, I should have said—to make such an one their wife. Still, if that kind of existence

pleases you, there is no reason why you should not enjoy it; you are pretty, graceful, dangerously clever, and reasonably wealthy; you may have, for many years yet to come, crowds of flattering admirers in your train; only—content yourself with those who are unwedded or unbetrothed!"

Estelle knew now that it was vain to hope, for she *had* hoped to regain her power over Edwin Haughton. For every reason it was best that they should part at once and for ever. After a minute's consideration she replied, "You are very kind, but I shall return to Redcliffe House merely to collect my own property; I shall then visit my friends, the Piercy-Roscoes; and I mean to marry James Compton."

"Very well! I think you will be less dangerous as a married woman; but have a care! James Compton knows the contemptuous way in which you have spoken of his suit; and, if I mistake not, he has a temper to retaliate. When you said that he was a mean, abject-looking creature, 'like a rat,' you were right, though it was unwomanly in you to make such remarks publicly, and in company with those who would be sure to carry to him your very uncomplimentary opinions; and I know that, abject as he is sometimes, he has the heart and soul of a tyrant. James Compton's wife will be a miserable woman; her married life will be either one long feud, or one long slavery and humiliation. Surely you might choose better!"

"Allow me to be the best judge," was Estelle's stiff answer. Her unuttered thought was: "What! did I compel you, with all your strong will and independence of thought and action, to yield yourself to my influence? did I make even the stern, uncompromising Philip Proctor own my sway, and that in the very face of his adored wife? and shall I not bend to my every desire the shy, weak, wavering, half-educated creature, who has but his immense wealth to recommend him to any woman, however ugly, elderly, and unattractive?"

And so ended the conversation between Estelle and Edwin. To this day they have neither met nor held any kind of communication. But Miss Drummond was not to escape so easily.

Dr. Clinton told her in plain unmistakeable English his opinion of her character, and his view of the part she had taken; and later in the day, going into the drawing-room, which she imagined deserted, she found Mrs. Etherington, who begged her to listen to a few words she had to say. She could not well decline, and she sat down, unwillingly enough, but somehow compelled to acquiescence by those clear, stedfast eyes, that seemed looking through and through her inmost soul. Without much preamble, Mrs. Etherington told her that she knew the history of poor Isabel's misery, and the apparent cause of her untimely end; "and now," she said, "that I have the opportunity, I cannot refrain from begging you seriously to consider your ways, and to repent ere it be too late: for your own sake, and for the sake of others, cease from a course whose issues are so fearful, a course which even in this world cannot fail to bring its own recompense and reward."

"Mrs. Etherington!" said Estelle, angrily, "if I have allowed some others to address me in a similar strain, I have yet to learn by what right you speak to me in the language of reproach and warning."

"The right by which I should warn any hapless creature whom I saw advancing blindly and wilfully to the brink of a precipice; the right by which I should interfere with any person who persisted in threading his way among quicksands, and involving others in the destruction so certainly awaiting him. Miss Drummond! I will not appeal to you merely on the ground of moral and social obligations; I will urge far higher considerations—do you believe that there is an Omnipresent and Omniscient God?"

"Certainly! I am no infidel, Mrs. Etherington."

"Then, how dare you violate his laws so openly, so persistently, so deliberately? Are you never afraid of a day of retribution? Do you know that it is written, 'It is impossible but that offences will come; but woe unto him through whom they come?' Are you prepared to meet the woe, the misery, the shame that conduct like yours must sooner or later entail? Next to desecration of the holy sacra-

ments, must come the profanation of sanctities instituted by God himself in the earliest ages of the world, and sealed by his Divine Son in His sojourn among the sons of earth. You have made shipwreck of the happiness of one married pair—one man and woman who might have found in each other their purest and deepest earthly joy, had you not interfered!"

"Never!" said Estelle, eagerly. "My cousin Isabel was too wilful, too proud, too passionate, ever to make the happiness of any man; least of all, the happiness of a man like Edwin Haughton. He too was self-willed, and endowed with a wonderful amount of self-appreciation; he could not forget or forgive the keen sarcasm and the reckless reproaches of a warm-tempered wife."

"With all that you had no concern. And you know best whether your cousin did not suffer extreme provocation; whether you did not adroitly call forth in her husband's presence, or towards him, all the evil of her nature; whether you did not contrive to bring into glaring contrast and opposition her impetuous temper, and your own mild, unruffled bearing; whether by affecting to deplore Isabel's foibles and deficiencies, you did not thereby increase them, and lead her husband to censure her with undue severity? You know, and God knows, and your poor tortured victim knew, that such was the case. Nothing can justify interference between man and wife. They will understand each other sooner, and learn to make allowances for mutual frailties more quickly, if left entirely to themselves. You have no business to influence a married man in any way; you have no business to engross his time, or his attention, to say nothing of his interest. Kindness and politeness every woman ought to receive from every man, but nothing more. His chief companion, his guide, his counsellor, the sharer of his secrets and his care, his helpmeet in joy and in sorrow, must be his wife, and she alone. Let no one presume to intermeddle with them in any way whatever. And if a man be so unfortunate as to marry imprudently, so that his wife cannot, or will not, be that which he has a right to expect, he must pay the penalty; he should have looked before he leaped. He will best consult his own

happiness by hiding from the rest of the world her deficiencies, by seeking kindly and patiently to improve her character; and, if that be hopeless, by bearing the disappointment in silence as the crook in his lot, without seeking or hoping to find in any other woman, as a friend, that which is denied him in his wife. If ever you are a married woman you will endorse the truth of every word I have uttered to-day. How would you like, how could you bear, a repetition of your own conduct in your own case?"

Estelle sat silent; proud and unconvinced as she looked, her heart was very heavy. She felt the full truth of all that Mrs. Etherington, all that Edwin and Dr. Clinton had said; and conscience, long repelled, and lulled, and appeased by many vain sophistries, was to be silenced no longer. And doubtless there were many hours when poor Isabel was deeply avenged, when Estelle endured the torment of that hell upon earth—a conscience loudly thundering, a heart filled with sullen remorse, and yet unrepentant and unsubdued.

The day following her conversation with Mrs. Etherington, Miss Drummond departed, greatly to the relief of Philip Proctor and his wife, who found it no easy task to discharge towards her, their self-constituted guest, the daily duties of hospitality. When they sat down to table, Philip always felt that she was welcome to the very best his board could furnish, if only she would be so obliging as to dine in the privacy of her own room, or in any room where he and Edith were not. Mr. Haughton pointedly avoided her companionship, and even little Mary wished that naughty Miss Drummond would go away, and never come back again till she became quite good.

At last, on the evening of May-day, Estelle found herself once more in the familiar drawing-room at Redcliffe House. Everything was in its accustomed place, but, over all, there hung an atmosphere of change and desolation. The flower-stands were in the windows, but there were no choice plants, no feathery ferns, no fragrant, glowing exotics, as in Isabel's time. The books were all put away, the cabinets were locked, and the piano was loaded with portfolios, and huge

volumes of engravings. Not for worlds could Estelle have opened it, and struck the keys, whose melody she had so often and so skilfully called forth at that very hour;—for in the twilight she had been accustomed to play for Edwin's gratification, he professing the strongest appreciation of her dreamy Nocturnes, Reveries, and wild German melodies, and her still wilder and more dreamy Nixen songs; she, with her streaming ringlets and her white flowing dress, looking somewhat like a Nixe in the shadowy, subdued light of the gathering nightfall; while, at the same time, he made no secret of the very light value he put upon poor Isabel's performance, which consisted chiefly of graceful Mazurkas, Operatic Fantasias, and pretty sparkling Quadrilles. And now she was alone—alone in all the world, it seemed just then; Edwin was estranged, separated from her for ever, and Isabel was in her grave.

The servants themselves moved about noiselessly in their deep mourning, with grave faces and with a constrained air. Estelle, gifted as she was with almost supernatural acuteness of perception, recognized, within three minutes of her arrival, the change that had passed over them. Their behaviour was not disrespectful; they were too well trained not to attend to their duties; but Estelle quickly perceived that they waited on her as it were under a protest: the housemaid, who brought in her solitary tea, looked stern, and preoccupied, and made the briefest answers to all questions asked, or remarks intended to lead to conversation: the footman, who carried it away, showed the same aspect, and pretended not to hear Miss Drummond's kind inquiry after his sister, who was at home from service, seriously ill.

The solitude in the upper rooms was perfectly appalling; only in the nursery was a stir, where nurse was busily packing her own and Master Haughton's clothes, for they were going next morning to set out on their journey to London, and from thence with Mr. Haughton to proceed to Calais; for Edwin felt that he should be more comfortable, and better able to endure his own miserable self-reproaches, when the sea rolled between him and Estelle.

The door of Isabel's boudoir was closed; her maid, indeed, had locked it that afternoon, jealous of an intrusion that seemed in her eyes, after all that had occurred, a downright profanation. She need not have feared, Estelle had no desire to enter; she passed the room with a shudder, and she hurried from the corridor on which all Isabel's apartments opened, for she was suddenly seized with a superstitious dread of meeting her cousin; she had always said that if ghosts ever did walk the earth, it must be the ghosts of those who were murdered or deeply wronged, and thus permitted to scare and punish their murderers or oppressors. And in spite of every argument repeated over and over again to herself twenty times a day, she could not help feeling that she had indirectly been the cause of Isabel's untimely death.

She wished to see little Alfred; but nurse, in a tone of authority, declared that he could not be disturbed; he was excited at the thought of the journey; he was a nervous child like his poor dear mother, and, if roused, would be sure to lie awake for hours, and so be unfit for travelling on the morrow. With a wretched feeling of loneliness, and a strong sense of the aversion with which she was regarded, Estelle went away moodily to her own room. Before leaving the Proctors, she had written to her friends, the Piercy-Roscoes, telling them that she was quite ready now to pay them a long-promised visit, and she would be with them on the third of May, at the latest. When she came down next morning, a letter lay on the breakfast-table; she hastily opened it, doubting not but that it was written to assure her of the warm welcome she would receive at Huyton, where the Piercy-Roscoes resided. The first thing that struck her with a cold dread was her own letter, which dropped from the envelope. Her own letter come back to her! What could it mean? Was it one of Eleanor Piercy-Roscoe's careless mistakes?

She read the letter; exceedingly brief, it only occupied her about a quarter of a minute:—"Mrs. P. Roscoe regrets that she cannot have the pleasure of receiving Miss Drummond's promised visit. Miss D. must perceive that, under existing

circumstances, the intimacy between herself and the Roscoe family must necessarily be discontinued." Estelle fell back in her chair, half stunned. Again her quick perceptions, the perceptions she had so shamefully abused, came to her aid; she divined, in its fullest extent, Mrs. Piercy-Roscoe's meaning. The world, ever ready to fix any stigma on those who offend on one point, judged her to be the guilty, shameful creature she was not, and never could have been. They believed that Isabel had flown from her own house because she could not, with propriety, remain under the same roof as herself.

And it was so. Estelle looked round upon former friends and acquaintances to find her influence gone, her position lost, and her character indelibly tarnished. She was altogether innocent of what the uncharitable world asserted of her, but she was not the less ruined for that—ruined by her vanity, and her love of admiration and pre-eminence.

But there was James Compton, her humble, despised admirer, her abject lover! Alas! Estelle would no longer serve his purpose. The young man was weak, small-souled, ignorant, and ugly, but he was very rich, and he thought his thousands might buy him a graceful, beautiful, clever wife, such an one as Estelle Drummond; but he had never bargained for aught that could breathe upon the fair fame of his future lady; his wife, like Cæsar's, "must be above suspicion." Three months afterwards the newspapers announced the marriage of Mr. James Compton.

And Estelle, sick at heart, afraid to meet a familiar face, hating the very pavement of the Liverpool streets, and, above all, the atmosphere of West Derby, determined to go quite away, and bury herself in the country. So, with her usual adroitness, she made every requisite arrangement; she took a journey into Wales, found a sequestered village, where anglers and tourists never came; found also a cottage, tolerably convenient, and very pretty; furnished it with all possible dispatch, hired an elderly chaperon to play propriety, and removed herself thither within a month of leaving London.

She lives there now, at the village with the unpronounceable and unspellable name, and the chaperon has proved herself a veritable she-dragon!

CHAPTER XXXII.

DEEPENING SHADOWS.

When Estelle was fairly gone there was peace once more in the household of the Proctors, and things returned to their accustomed routine. But as the spring gradually flushed into summer, as the days grew to their longest, and as the air grew warmer and the atmosphere more sultry, that city home of theirs became far from pleasant, or healthy. Edith was pale and languid; in vain she scolded herself for being idle, and in vain she struggled against the overpowering sense of weariness that oppressed her: all through that sunny May, and the burning midsummer month that succeeded, she felt the greatest difficulty in getting through her daily household duties; and every evening she rejoiced as the hour of bedtime approached, and hoped that the morning might find her refreshed and invigorated, and ready for the work that, in spite of all her efforts, was accumulating in every direction. And every morning she rose unwillingly, feeling as though her rest had been altogether insufficient, and compelling herself to face the common tasks that had been all through her married life her pride and her pleasure, but were now a toil, a weariness, and an insupportable burden. She had borne up nobly; all through poor Isabel's illness, she had been equal to every emergency; and now Nature was taking her revenge, and showing most indubitably that the hour of reaction might be postponed, but not adjourned *sine die*.

And, as the days passed on, Edith felt more and more

indisposed; her step was slower, her cheek paler, and her eyes heavier; till at length, one morning, Matty roused Philip in his "den," by rushing in without the usual preliminary of tapping at the door, and beseeching him to come into the kitchen that moment, for "the missus had been and gone and fainted right away!"

Philip was seriously alarmed, for Edith was by no means a fainting subject, and his alarm deepened into something like absolute terror when he found that the usual remedies were of no avail whatever. Never, since that first long illness after little Mary's birth, had he seen so wan and white a face; it reminded him of Isabel's, when the fever-flush was gone, and the features sharpening down into their last rigid aspect of death. He lifted her in his strong arms and carried her upstairs, and laid her on the bed, as easily as though she were a little child; then Matty and nurse undressed her, now and then pausing to try some fresh remedy; and still she lay in that deep swoon, as cold and motionless and pallid as though life had already departed.

Philip, in great dismay, sent off a messenger to Dr. Clinton; so great was his consternation that he felt inclined to summon every physician in and about his neighbourhood, and he waited impatiently for the doctor's appearance. He came, just as Edith was opening her eyes, and wondering how she came to be in bed instead of in the kitchen; and he looked very grave, and insisted on his patient remaining where she was, for, at least, the remainder of that day; and when he went down with Philip into the drawing-room, he told him that his wife had sadly over-exerted herself, and that she must take complete and immediate rest, and, above all, have a thorough change of air and change of scene, and that without delay. He went away, saying, "Get her down to the sea-side at once, Mr. Proctor; I can do nothing for her here; this atmosphere, in her present state, is absolutely fatal: if she remain in London another fortnight I will not answer for the consequences. A month ago, and this might have been prevented; however, it is by no means too late," he added, encouragingly; for Philip was looking so pale and

agitated that he thought he might be preparing for the sick list too; "only, remember, there is not a day to lose. Never mind what she says; treat her as a thorough invalid. I have not been in daily communication with Mrs. Proctor for nothing. I have learnt to know her unselfishness and her self-sacrificing habits, and I dare say she will think so much trouble and expense altogether unnecessary, when only her own comfort and well-being are concerned. But if she hesitate, tell her that a change is also imperative for the little girl—your daughter. Mrs. Proctor is in a very delicate state, and I very much doubt whether she would survive a sultry summer in London."

And so, Dr. Clinton departed, and Philip remained absorbed in his own meditations. That they were far from pleasant, his knitted brows, his care-laden aspect, and his compressed lips, plainly demonstrated. He was going over the question of "expenses." Yes! it was a miserable truth; but he really did not know where to find the money which would be required if he sent his family to the sea-side. The liabilities of the firm were frightful; and, though the business prospered and increased, difficulties of a pecuniary nature seemed in no wise to diminish. Philip knew very well that, on her own account, Edith would never be persuaded to incur any extra expense, for he hid nothing from her now, and she was perfectly aware of the worry and the ceaseless annoyances to which her husband and his partner were exposed on account of insufficiency of capital. But the proposed change was imperative, and Philip, while he moodily discussed with himself the ways and means, never for a moment thought of relinquishing it. Come what might, Edith and the children, and of course one servant, must spend some time in comfortable sea-side lodgings; the money must be forthcoming, if it only involved a further and increased complication of difficulties; the question was, where the necessary sum could be found?

The longer Philip thought, the more inextricable seemed the confusion of his affairs: O, that question of expenses, what a weary, saddening question it had come to be! "O

that I had listened to my wife," said Philip, to himself, "or rather, I wish I had never acted without taking counsel with her! The signing of the contract which bound me to the Castle-street premises was the first step that involved my present misery. If, as Edith suggested, I had only been content to stay on in Myrtle-place for two or three years longer, I might have *saved* enough to begin a larger business in the town, and I need have incurred no debt. Then again, had I been ruled by her, I should never have made those alterations, which seemed to extend themselves so naturally; really when a man begins to play with bricks and mortar he never knows when to have done; he is worse than a child. And, above all, had I resisted Edwin and Estelle, had I never concluded this partnership, I might have avoided much care and sorrow. I thought to free myself from a long-oppressive weight; but I only shifted the burden from one shoulder to another, or rather, I changed a moderate load for one which I have neither strength nor courage to support."

All that day Edith lay very quiet and still on her bed; and Philip, when he ran up to see how she was going on, tried to look calm and cheerful, hoping that if he wore an unusually anxious look she would attribute it all to his fears for her. Late in the evening, when the day's work was fairly concluded, he brought his cup of cocoa and his dry toast—his regular supper—up-stairs to her bedside, for the solitude of the dining-room was insupportable. To sit there in lonely state was not to be thought of: the long table looked like a desert without Edith at its head, and the room itself wore a most desolate and comfortless aspect in his eyes, because Edith had not entered it since the morning. So he picked up the little tray, on which Matty had just served his frugal supper, and marched up-stairs, wondering how miserable bachelors and hapless widowers endured their hard fate. A house without a wife seemed to him, just then, very much like the world without the sun. He rather despised bachelors, but with all his soul he pitied widowers: then came the terrible fear that such might be his own lot ere the summer was over: "Dr. Clinton had said that everything

depended on change of air: suppose the change should not do all that was expected; suppose the long-continued exertions, the anxiety about Isabel, the days of care and the nights of watching, had been too much for her, on whom all his happiness depended! Suppose the time was coming when those rooms would be always sad and desolate, when he should sit by his solitary fire-side musing on the days that were gone, and go to his solitary chamber to weep the night away in fruitless tears; when he, like his favourite poet, would be always crying in the very depths of his lonely, aching spirit,—

> "O! for the touch of a vanished hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still."

It was too much. Even the contemplation of such a possibility was unendurable. O! what would be the reality! To escape from a train of thought he could not otherwise dismiss, he hastened to his wife's presence; feeling, however, an intense pity and a tender reverence for all true widowers, such as he had never known before. The sight of Edith's pale face cheered him; for it was less pale than it had been, and her eyes were not so languid, and she seemed inclined to talk, and very glad to have him at her side.

"Have you had a very busy day, love?" she asked, as he drew up his chair and the little table, with a pleasant sensation of returning comfort and renewed hope.

"Yes, rather busy, my dear; but really one is always busy in this busy, bustling London of ours. How do you feel now, darling?"

"O, so much better! A day's rest has quite set me up, and I mean to be super-sensible, for I do not intend getting up to-morrow morning till I have had my breakfast. I cannot imagine what made me faint this morning. You need not have sent for Dr. Clinton, my dear."

"Indeed, Edie, it was high time to send for him. He says I am to consider you as a decided invalid; you are altogether out of health, and you are to go down to the seaside at once—you and the children, and I suppose Matty, for she would be more useful to you than nurse, all things considered."

Edith's eyes brightened; a sight of the great waves, and a breath of the salt breezes, would do her all the good in the world. She had been secretly pining for them ever since the warm weather set in; and then the fresh, pure air, surroundings of hill and heath, rock and sand and pebble—the very prospect of them seemed to bring new life and invigoration.

"O, really, Philip!" she said, sitting quite upright, and a flush of pleasurable excitement tinting her pale cheeks as she spoke, "do you really mean that we are to go?"

"Yes, dearest; and Dr. Clinton says it must be at once, or you will be seriously ill."

"Ah! But, Philip, I think it will not do; think of the expense; and just now you want every penny you can spare for the business. We must try some other plan, my dear; I will take some cod-liver oil."

"Nonsense, Edie; I believe you think cod-liver oil is an infallible remedy for anything. No, it is change you require—change of scene, as well as change of air; for the doctor says the mind has been overwrought. So just settle where you will go, and begin your preparations to-morrow. I mean to have the house to myself this day week."

"But, Philip, dear, *can* we afford it?"

"My love, we *will* afford it; therefore say not another word on that head. I may as well pay travelling expenses as doctor's bills; and it is not alone on your account, my dear, that I am so determined to send you away. Our little Mary would scarcely live through the summer in this atmosphere, and Susy and baby are looking the worse for their city life. Where had you better take up your quarters?"

"I suppose you cannot accompany us?"

"Impossible: I wish I could. However, I will try to spare a day or two—come down some Friday evening and stay till Tuesday morning, perhaps. Where shall it be? Ramsgate—Hastings—Brighton?"

"No, those places are all too fashionable, and therefore too expensive for us. But, Philip, if you say we must really go, I know where I should like to spend a little time; and it would not be so very, very dreadfully expensive."

"Go where you like, dear; I only stipulate that there should be the sea, and, of course, the shore, and clean, airy lodgings, and good food to be bought at a reasonable price. Of course, the nearer home the better, both as regards railway fare, and my coming down for a day or two."

"The Heathcotes are just going out; I saw Mrs. Heathcote only yesterday, and she told me she and the children and Mr. Heathcote himself were going early next week to some place on the South Coast, where she spends several weeks every year. She says it is a lovely place, not at all fashionable, and not too expensive; lodgings are cheap, and provisions are to be had at a very moderate rate. I forget the name of the place, but it is a mere fishing village, and the nearest station is Lyncombe. She wished I and my children were going with them, and I wished it too; but, thinking it impossible, I said it could not be, for we did not mean to leave home at all this summer."

"Well, you had better go to the Heathcotes to-morrow, if you are well enough; you shall have a cab to Fenchurch-street, and go first-class, and you and Mrs. Heathcote can make your arrangements."

And so it was settled; but when the morrow came Edith was quite unequal to the short journey, and Philip, though he could ill spare the time, resolved to go himself. It was an opportunity not to be let slip; it would be such a comfort to have Edith with friends, and friends, too, with whom she assimilated so well, and who evidently appreciated her as she appreciated them.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Heathcote were rejoiced at this addition to their party, and Mrs. Heathcote sat down before Philip left, to write to the landlady who always received them, to say she must keep the whole house, instead of a part of it, for their reception, as another sitting-room and two bed-rooms would be required. They were to leave London on the following Monday; for Mr. Heathcote, after the fashion of his fraternity, had preached his voice away, and was obliged to find a substitute for the services of the coming Sunday. Philip looked rather serious at this announcement, but Mrs. Heathcote

assured him it would all come right as soon as they were settled at Bayscliff. Leonard always went on working till his voice failed him, and he always recovered it as soon as he had rest, and sea-air. The difficulty was to keep him quiet at Bayscliff: he would be for ever preaching to the fishermen, and making temperance speeches in the town-hall at Lyncombe. Nobody knew how much trouble ministers' wives had to keep their wilful husbands in good order; for eleven months in the year, Lottie said, she expected to have to obey her husband, and she generally left him to follow his own sweet will, whatever it might be; but for the month spent at Bayscliff, she always bargained for the rule; and the fundamental law of her government was perfect rest—cessation of every kind of labour, whether of the pulpit, the platform, or the pen."

"She will not even allow me to improve my mind," said Mr. Heathcote, dolefully. "Have a care how you allow your wife to have absolute sway. I assure you, when I bought a new theological work last summer, she took it away, and locked it up with the leaves uncut. Mrs. Heathcote will not allow Mrs. Proctor anything more profound than 'Jack the Giant-killer.'"

"Do you know," said Mrs. Heathcote, "I have a great mind to say you are slandering me. I should be very sorry to go to Bayscliff without books, but I will not have you stooping over tomes of abstruse divinity when you might be listening to what the wild waves are saying. Trust me, their teaching is better for you just now than all the dogmatic theology and polemical divinity of the schools; and I am sure you think so too, Leonard, if you would only confess it."

And Leonard quietly assented. In spite of his cheerfulness it was easy to see that he was almost as much of an invalid as Edith, and the sooner he too was removed from the scene of his labours the better it would be. And Mrs. Heathcote, under an air of external composure, was really painfully anxious; for though once in the year it was the custom of her husband to work himself to the very last limits that oppressed Nature would permit, he had never before been so thoroughly

prostrate, and really unable to lift up his voice in his own pulpit. She was tasting, only just tasting, a little of the bitterness of that potion which falls to the lot of so many ministers' wives. And if so sickening the first drop, what must the whole draught be? Lottie Heathcote shuddered to think of it, almost as Philip had shuddered the night before, when contemplating the possibility of being left in his dreary home without his Edith's gentle voice and smile.

The next Monday morning the friends met at the station; and early in the afternoon they were comfortably settled at Bayscliff. And in the evening, Lottie took Edith down to the shore, and showed her some of her old haunts, and talked of the days when she had walked there with Leonard before her marriage; and Edith, sitting on the smooth pebbles, and listening to the murmur of the receding waves, and feeling on her face the sweet health-giving breezes, that swept gently over the cool, yellow sands, felt her spirits wonderfully revive, and her strength seemed to come back again, as it were, by magic. She was sure a month of Bayscliff air would make her as vigorous and hearty as she used to be in the days of her girlhood; and she felt instinctively that a time was coming when her utmost strength would be needed, for that Philip could continue to struggle for any length of time against the burdens that weighed him down, and the liabilities that fettered him on every side, seemed quite impossible. Strange to say, the thought of impending evil in that form did not distress her so very much. Philip had done his utmost; if it was God's will that he should not succeed in the task he had somewhat rashly assigned himself, she was sure it would be found to occupy his time and his energies—perhaps with a far happier result.

Now that Edith possessed the undivided confidence of her husband, now that he no longer hardened his heart against God's truth, she felt strong for any trial—ready to stand up by his side and face whatever difficulties there might be to be encountered. Ah! yes; any trouble, any suffering shared with him would be sweeter than any joy—if, indeed, there could be joy—without him.

Not yet could she be certain that Philip had resolved to give his heart to Christ; but she thought that great change in her husband's soul was being silently and gradually wrought; and that hope, that precious prospect of a future wherein she and Philip should be linked inseparably as they had never been before, nerved her for every contest, and strengthened her for the coming tempest, which she felt assured was gathering fast over her home horizon. But if Philip were a Christian, she could bear it all!

And so, in pleasant converse, and long rambles, and sea-bathing, the weeks passed away. Edith was quite well and strong again; little Mary received great benefit from the salt-water and the exhilarating breezes, while Susy and baby were fatter and rosier than they had ever been before. Mr. Heathcote, too, was quite ready to return to his post: the rest and the change had done their work; his voice was once more clear and sonorous, and his wife's anxieties, for that season at least, were over. Philip had only been able to spend one Sunday with them; he came down on Saturday afternoon, and returned to town by the early train on Monday morning. Edith was not the only one who thought he looked painfully grave and solicitous.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TELEGRAM.

THE bright summer afternoon was waning rapidly, the more subdued lights of evening were falling aslant the grey rocks on the pleasant Bayscliff shore, and casting on the deep blue sea-water long lines of rippling gold. Far away, round the dark, scarred headland of the bay, shone out the white houses and the tall spires of Lyncombe, and almost on the horizon's verge glided a snowy sail, that caught the lowering sunbeam as it fell. Mr. and Mrs. Heathcote, with their little daughter Margaret, and Edith were taking their after-tea stroll on the cool wide-stretching sands; three more days and they would be again in the busy London, that seemed, in this quiet, breezy fishing village, more like some mighty city well pictured in a tale, than an actual reality of life.

"O, papa, all your curls will be blown away!" cried Margaret, as Mr. Heathcote allowed his hat to dangle by its elastic string from the button-hole where it was secured.

"And all yours too, Gipsy! They are much longer than mine, and so much the more in danger; and mamma's too, and Mrs. Proctor's! It threatens to be a serious business, Miss Margaret."

"O, never mind! Papa, I wish you would give up your church in London, and have one built at Bayscliff. I am sure mamma would like it, and I should be so glad I should not know what to do!"

"I am not sure that mamma would like it."

"O, mamma would. Would you not, dear mamma?"

"No, Margaret; I would rather stay in our own house, and I should be very sorry if papa were to give up the church in L—— street, and so would you if you thought a little more

about it, dearest. Our people love us very much, and they trust papa with all their troubles, and we love them, and the parting would be very hard to bear, on both sides, if it ever really came."

"Ah, I see," said the little maiden. "Well, perhaps we should get tired of Bayscliff, especially in the winter, when we could not be on the shore. I don't like the village-street when it rains."

"Mrs. Proctor," said Mr. Heathcote, "you must come to the re-opening of my church in September; we shall have grand doings, I can tell you. Opening services, of course; school-feasts, tea-parties to a frightful extent. I am only afraid Lottie's plans are too extensive. It will take a week at least to make the cake! All our old women, and, of course, all the young ones, and all the old men, and all the children who can possibly prove themselves to be connected with our schools are to have some kind of treat. I wish Lottie well through it."

"I am not afraid," said Lottie, bravely. "But it will indeed be a season of rejoicing when the new building is finished; we have wanted more room so long, and now we shall have four hundred more seats, wider space everywhere, and the most perfect ventilation that can be contrived. Moreover, we have been carrying on the service so long among bricks and mortar, and scaffold-poles, and resorting to such strange contrivances to maintain things just decent and in order, that it will indeed be a luxury to worship once more in an airy, handsome, well-appointed sanctuary, such as ours will be when the alterations are completed."

"Do you know, Mrs. Proctor, my wife thinks she has actually proved my claims to apostolical succession?"

"Indeed! How, may I ask? I thought we left that hallucination to certain of our Episcopalian brethren, who know no better."

"You have not seen my vestry, Mrs. Proctor, and words fail me when I attempt to describe its uninviting and chaotic state and aspect. Suffice it to say, that it has no light that the floor is partly up and the wall partly down, and that it is altogether dismantled, and emptied of everything save two chairs,

and plenty of brick-ends, and a good supply of loose mortar. I always find these two chairs dusted for my use; one, of course, I sit upon, the other serves me for a table; and there, if any one wants me before or after service, I am to be found, sitting like Marius amid the ruins—not of Carthage, but of my vestry. I cannot even wash my hands, and the looking-glass being removed I cannot inspect my personal appearance; and I pore over my 'notes' in a sort of *chiaro oscuro* that comes through the chinks of the boarding. I can assure you the whole thing has a most Primitive, Early-Church effect, especially on a gloomy day, when I am obliged to ask for a candle ere I can distinguish the words of my text."

"But what has that to do with apostolical succession?"

"A great deal, according to Lottie's showing. She says she can imagine Peter, or Paul, sitting in just such a hovel, altogether heedless of his sacerdotal dignity, as I am of mine; but she cannot imagine that world-honoured tent-maker, or the impetuous fisherman, attended by an obsequious beadle, and, with a countenance 'mildly severe,' arranging his hands before a mirror. I am afraid, though, we do not go far enough: it is my private opinion that neither Paul nor Peter troubled themselves at all about a vestry."

"I meant, Mrs. Proctor," said Lottie, "to infer that my husband has succeeded to the apostolical spirit, and to many apostolical privations, and trials, and discomforts, of which the forlorn vestry may fairly be considered a type. Of course I am aware that he has no claim to that mysterious inheritance derived through Popes, and anti-popes, and fat abbots, and profligate priests; and I am very well contented that he should be without it. And yet, there are many good men who actually believe in this much-vaunted succession; it is an article of their belief, to which they cling as firmly and fondly as we do to the doctrines of Redemption and special providences. How is it, Leonard?"

"By what chain of reasoning they argue themselves into such credence, I cannot, my dear, inform you; but I think much is to be accounted for by educational training, early and cherished associations, the force of circumstances, &c. Pre-

scription, antiquity, and traditional belief have a peculiar power of their own, which we, who are in great measure uninfluenced by them, cannot fully comprehend. One thing, however, is easily comprehensible; and that is, that there is immense diversity of mind, even as there is infinite variety of form and feature; and uniformity in this world is a myth, after which the churches of Christ have ofttimes vainly pursued, and always with the same result of disappointment and injury."

"I think," said Edith, "the great mischief is, that uniformity is mistaken for unity."

"Exactly so; we are reminded that the Church of Christ is to be *one*, even as the Divine Father and the Blessed Son are one; and so it must be, and so it is; for all who are true members of that holy and Catholic Church are one in Him, the Source and Centre of their faith, the living Stem from which all the branches spring, and from which their nourishment is derived, the Head of the whole body. And even as on the branches of the vine are many leaves and many clusters of differing aspects, and of varied qualities; and as the body is formed of many members, some of which are vigorous and comely, and others weak and uncomely—so the vine is but one tree, and the members united to one head, but one body; and so are all true believers, whatever may be their differences of opinion, or doctrine, or discipline, or mode of worship, in real unity one with another; and that there may be this true unity which Christ Himself has ordained, the phantom of uniformity must be abandoned."

"And our central point of meeting is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?"

"Exactly so! The faith and love which bind us to Him, our Saviour and King, bind us also to each other. If I love Christ, if I meet with another man who can say from his inmost heart, 'Lord! thou knowest that I love Thee,' that man is my brother in the faith, however widely he and I differ in church polity and other minor matters. We meet here on one common vantage-ground, and we shall meet hereafter in that clearer light, where all vain disputes will

melt away like the mists of morning before the victorious sun."

"And yet," said Edith, musingly, "how universal has been the pursuit of that same phantom of uniformity! In all ages, under all circumstances, it has been the main delusion, and the great stumbling-block of the Christian Church! Scarcely had the persecutions of Paganism ceased, when the early Christians, by reason of their different apprehensions of the Divine Word, found themselves separated into conflicting parties; and immediately the stronger sought to coerce the weaker, and the hand of the temporal power was put forth, where it had no right to intermeddle or to interpose its authority."

"Yes! And the worst of it is, that the same spirit, in a milder form, is in us who rejoice in all the liberalisms and illuminations of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Our Episcopalian friends defend their Act of Uniformity, and tell us we have no right to dissent; of course we are in a position now to smile at so absurd a statement—but are they alone in that spirit we so naturally and so rightly condemn? By no means; I am afraid we Nonconformists are sadly inclined to keep a small private store of intolerance, to be used on special occasions, and when we think fit to make a little display of our own freedom and superiority. Intolerance is the natural attribute of poor human depravity. A few there are who, like the beloved John, delight chiefly in saying, 'Little children, love one another;' but these, alas! are the few—the quibbling, the captious, the arbitrary, are the many."

"I wonder how we shall feel in the world to come," said Lottie, "when we look back upon those contests in which we have been so earnest, so absorbed?"

"Very much, I fancy, as we feel now in looking back to the little anxieties of early childhood, which were entirely the result of ignorance, weakness, and want of judgment. And now, do you not think we have discussed this subject sufficiently? Why trouble ourselves at all about this phantom of uniformity? Lottie! look at that lovely golden network

out there, beyond the fishing nets. What does it make you think of?"

"Of many things that are fair and lovely; but I fancy you are referring to something to which it has special reference—what is it?"

"Keble's 'many-twinkling smile of ocean,' an idea, however, evidently suggested by the 'Prometheus' of Æschylus."

"Suggested or not, it is a beautiful expression, especially when one realizes it so thoroughly as we do at this moment. See, now! how every wave is flecked with a golden light, and far out there towards the eastern headland, how deep a purple rests on the water! And O! what a sunset we shall have. Sky and waves have melted together in that broad, burning radiance. That makes me think of another of Keble's verses,—

'Even the richest, tenderest glow
Sets round the autumnal sun—
But there sight fails; no heart may know
The bliss when life is done.'"

"No, indeed! for it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive what good things God has prepared for them that love Him. Come, we must turn our steps inland, for the tide will be coming in, and it would not be pleasant to be caught among these 'still, salt pools, locked in with bars of sand;' we should quickly hear the 'plunging seas' draw not backward, but forward to the land, to our infinite discomfort and danger. Mrs. Proctor, you are looking very tired."

"I think I am tired," replied Edith, trying to speak with animation; "and yet, it is not altogether that. I must confess to being rather childish: I expected to hear from my husband yesterday morning, and I was disappointed; but I thought little of it, feeling quite sure this morning's post would bring me all I wanted. And now that so many hours have elapsed, I begin to be uncomfortable, nay, very anxious; I cannot help feeling that something has happened."

"Mr. Proctor is so occupied with his business," suggested Mrs. Heathcote.

"Still he would write. His business habits extend to his

private concerns; they make him very punctual, especially in correspondence. I know I am very silly, but I cannot help it; I have been tormenting myself all the afternoon and evening with 'may-be's.' Ah! you shake your head, Mr. Heathcote; but there are hours of weakness, when a mere 'may-be' acquires terrible significance."

"I know it," he replied quietly, for there was a slight tone of excitement in Edith's manner which he had never observed before. "I can look back to several eras in my life, when the very thought of what *might* be, made my heart sink with apprehension. Such hours are trials of our faith; for we know that all the coming joy or grief is '*ordered*;'—yes, ordered in all things, and sure—sure of working together for the good of God's own children. Only the flesh is weak, and we fear as we enter into the cloud."

"Yes," said Edith, catching at the idea; "the disciples *feared* when they entered into the cloud; but there, shut out from the world, they saw the glory of their Lord."

"Even so. If we would climb the mountain of Transfiguration we must pass through the chilling mists of sorrow, and pain, and apprehension. Often, in this chequered pilgrimage of ours, we have to cross wide seas of trouble, that we may reach, presently, a peaceful pleasant haven; ofttimes we are called to a fiery conflict, to a fierce struggle, to tossings to and fro, and weariness of spirit that makes one say, ''twere better to depart;' while beyond all is an infinite calm."

"Once, on these very sands," said Mrs. Heathcote, "there came upon me one of those trials of faith of which my husband speaks. I was here with my dear aunt; it was just before her death; the cholera was raging in London, and Leonard, who I knew was in the midst of it, had been silent for several days. I thought he was dead; I had scarcely any doubt about it; and I used to pace those sands, watching the shining waters and the tall ships gliding on to their haven, in such an agony of spirit as I have never since experienced. Then my aunt died; she had been ill for some time, but the end came suddenly; and then I was told, though it was a

mistake, that Leonard was seized with the cholera, and from that moment I gave him up. I never dreamed of the possibility of his recovery."

"Was he not ill at all?"

"Yes, he was very ill with a sort of low fever. When he got a little better he came down here for change of air; and the sea-breezes and my good nursing, under God's blessing, soon set him up again."

"I do not wonder at your caring so much for this place; and if all should be well I should like to come here again next summer."

But even as Edith spoke the strong conviction that, in a temporal point of view, all would *not* be well came over her mind with overwhelming force. Coming events had long been casting their shadows before them: the difficulties with which Philip was so bravely, yet so hopelessly contending, could have but one issue. And for the thousandth time Edith deplored that fatal partnership, which had caused her husband to enter upon so vast a field in the busy, enterprising publishing world with so little ready money at command. Robert Anderson's few thousands—what were they in a business such as that in which he and Philip were engaged? The business seemed to absorb money, as the famous Chat Moss once absorbed rubbish: it was a whirlpool, involving in its insatiable vortex no end of funds—a quicksand in which much substantial good seemed to be sunk, never more to appear to human eye.

So intent was Edith upon these thoughts, that she scarcely heard Mrs. Heathcote saying how much she loved Bayscliff for the sake of those old days, and above all, for the sake of the flowery grave under the shadow of the grey church-walls where her aunt, the gentle Mrs. Sinclair, lay at rest. Mr. Heathcote saw her pre-occupied look: as they reached the pebbly beach, and came under the rocks of Bayscliff, he drew near, and said, "Dear Mrs. Proctor, remember it is written, '*All* the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.'"

She turned round with a grateful look. "Thank you. Yes! I am sure of it; strength will be given according to the

day, according to my need, to the need of all. Tell me something more to do me good; your words are full of comfort and invigoration."

"Not *my* words! Listen, then—'Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; Thy judgments are a great deep; Thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures'—and one other word—'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.'"

They were alone now, for Mrs. Heathcote and Margaret had gone on, up the rocky stair, that led to an upper terrace on which their garden-gate opened. On this terrace they paused to give one more look at the calm, solemn beauty of the scene. In after days, Edith always remembered that hour, even as she remembered that miserable morning in Castle-street, when Estelle came to bring her the news of the partnership. She could always see the wide waste of waters with the golden glory yet on its western waves; the purple splendour lingering, as if loth to depart from the gorgeous sunset sky; the grey towers of the church, on its promontory, rising above the dark bluish foliage of the Scotch firs; the white houses glimmering beneath the hills, and the bright yellow stone-crop, like a carpet at her feet. She could always hear the moan of the rising waters, the deep murmur of the in-coming tide, the wailing cry of the plover skimming over some reedy marsh-land not far off, and the iron tongue of time telling the hour of nine.

Presently she heard Mrs. Heathcote's voice calling first "Leonard!" and then "*Edith!*" It was the first time Mrs. Heathcote had ever called her by her Christian name. Why had she done so now? And then her voice, was it not excited, and rather unsteady?

"They are calling us," said Edith, turning quickly into the garden. "Here I am, Mrs. Heathcote; what is it?"

Mrs. Heathcote came down the garden walk, followed at a respectful distance by Matty. She had something white in her hand, and there was an anxious expression on her face.

"A letter!" cried Edith. "O, pray give it me!"

"Not a letter, dear Mrs. Proctor: a telegram. Nay, do not look so scared; telegrams do not invariably bring evil tidings."

Edith almost gasped for breath as she tore it open. It was sent by Dr. Clinton, and contained only these words:—"Mr. Proctor seriously indisposed, return immediately." As she finished reading it, it fell from her hands, and Mr. Heathcote took it up and looked at its contents. "You will like to go immediately, by the next train," he said, gently. "Come into the house, and sit down; Lottie will make all ready for your journey."

"But the children?" objected poor Edith, feeling so bewildered, that the little ones seemed insurmountable obstacles to her setting forth at once, as she wished.

"Trust them to us," replied Mrs. Heathcote; "we will care for them as our own. Eight children are as easily managed as five, you know; only you must leave Matty, on dear little Mary's account."

"Will you indeed be so good?" said Edith, gratefully. She felt that just at present it would be a great comfort to be free from maternal cares.

Lottie resumed—"Indeed we will, if you choose to call it goodness. And never mind packing, Matty shall put up what you want, and the rest of the luggage can come with us on Friday. I will make you some tea. Nay, you must have something; your health is of importance; you do not know what demands may be made upon you at home. Do not tremble so, dear; it may be better than you anticipate."

"No," said Edith, decidedly; "Dr. Clinton would never have summoned me without most urgent need. He wanted me to stay here another fortnight: besides, the telegram said '*seriously* indisposed;' that means very, *very* ill."

"I will go immediately to the hotel," said Mr. Heathcote, "and order a carriage. We shall catch the 10.30 train from Lyncombe. You will let me accompany you?"

"To Lyncombe? O, yes; thank you.'

"No, to London; you are not fit to travel by yourself, and a day or two is of no consequence to me. Lottie will wish it, I am sure."

"O yes! yes, indeed," interposed Lottie, eagerly; "Leonard must go with you; I should be miserable if you went alone; and, as he says, a day or two sooner does not matter; and he may be of use to you in town."

Mrs. Heathcote little thought of how much use her husband was to be.

Edith had no strength to remonstrate; she sat like one stupified, till Lottie summoned her up-stairs to change her light dress for one more suitable to a night journey. A few minutes afterwards the carriage came rattling up to the garden gate, and Lottie hurried her friend down the garden walk, squeezing her hand very hard at parting, and whispering, "Trust in the Lord, dear. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. GRABB.

The cool night air, blowing in from the sea, revived Edith as she rode along over the thymy heath towards the railway-station at Lyncombe. It was not dark, for at that time of the year the summer twilight lingered on the hills till the streaks of dawn shot through the eastern sky, and a crescent moon mingled its pale, shimmering radiance with the faint beams that daylight had left behind, as if in pledge of its speedy return. Distinctly visible was the white road winding its way over the dark, uneven Down, and like molten silver showed the restless waves, where the moonbeams fell softly upon them. The shore was dim and dusky, but Edith could

see the fishing-nets, and even fix upon the spot, now covered with tumbling waves, where she, with Mr. and Mrs. Heathcote, had been standing earlier in the evening. Every word of their rather desultory conversation, though little noted at the time, she remembered now with singular minuteness, and with her miserable suspense and her agonizing dread of what might be awaiting her at home, came ludicrous reminiscences of Mr. Heathcote's ruined vestry, as he had laughingly described it two hours before. Strange mystery of the human soul, that, in its bitterest pangs, in its wildest throbs of agony, can revert to merest trifles, dwelling upon them with an exactitude that is sometimes as tormenting as it is comprehensible! Then she strained her eyes along the white and devious track their conveyance must take. O! could not the carriage go faster? What if the train should be missed?—what if she had to remain at Lyncombe till the morning? She felt as if such delay must be unendurable.

She had habituated herself to contemplate all possible worldly disasters; she had gradually prepared herself for the total wreck of their fortunes that was evidently impending—she had known so long that the blow must come, that its falling was only a question of time; and though she shrank from the ruin and the misery that seemed gradually but surely gathering around them, she did not feel that the trial would be beyond her strength: but that Philip's health should fail was a possibility she had never contemplated; she had never taken into account this phase of misfortune; for never since their marriage had Philip known a single day of illness, a mere passing headache or a cold being all the maladies that had ever called forth her nursing capacities; and it seemed nearly incredible that he, robust, and hearty, and of perfectly sound constitution, should be now lying prostrate on a bed of sickness. Wearily she listened to the noise of the half-tide waves breaking upon the black rocks that were fast being submerged in the rising waters, and to the deep sighing of the night wind through the thick black pines that belted the breezy moorland where it gradually rose and swelled into a chain of low green hills; and wearily she

thought and thought with a want of continuity that sometimes made her fear her senses must be deserting her.

At length the moorland narrowed, and the white road grew straighter and broader, and presently there were signs of human habitation, and the fishing smacks in the river showed clear and picturesque in the fading light of the setting moon. Not very far off was the station, with its red and blue signals, and Edith felt as if the first stage of her journey was accomplished. They were too early for the train, and Mr. Heathcote would have taken her to the ladies' waiting-room, but she preferred walking up and down the platform till the time of departure. "Indeed," she said, looking into his face with such meek wretchedness that his heart bled for her, "I could not rest; do not let me keep you here; the place is quite quiet, no one will notice me, only I must be moving. I feel as if it would be a relief to walk to London."

"I shall prefer the platform to the waiting-room," replied Mr. Heathcote; "the heat under the gaslights is intolerable. I will walk with you, dear Mrs. Proctor, and we can have a little talk about this sudden journey that we foresaw so little when we were rambling on the Bayscliff sands two hours ago. Our train is the express; we shall be in London—ay, in the City—before two."

"Ah!" she said presently, when they had taken several turns in silence; "what must you think of me? What must I think of myself? Where is my faith? At this moment I feel as if all things were against me; I dread the worst, and I have no strength wherewith to meet it."

"None of your own, certainly! But there is the promise standing secure and inviolable to-night as it has stood through all the ages of this troublous, mutable world—'As thy day, so shall thy strength be.' You are stunned now; you can hardly think consecutively; your misery even scarcely seems a reality, and you lack almost the power to lay hold on the promises: but have patience, you will feel better presently, and then you will experience the faithfulness and lovingkindness of the Lord. In all its full force and meaning you will receive that word which has comforted so many of God's

people in the hour of their extremity—'He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.' You have no might now; wait awhile, trusting Him fully, and strength shall be given you in full measure."

"I will try to do so," she replied, sadly: "but do you know, I cannot even pray. I feel so stupified—I am like a person on the verge of delirium; when I try to think seriously and continuously, my mind wanders in a strange, aimless fashion: all sorts of trifles, all manner of irrelevant ideas crowd in upon me, and I am confused and weary."

"Never mind! Try to rest now; commend yourself and your husband to God; you *know* that all is in His hands—the hands of your most loving and tender Father. Do not disquiet yourself about your own want of faith; mental and physical weakness overpowers you now, hence your spiritual perceptions are overclouded. 'Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.'"

"If I only knew the real extent of the evil," said Edith, sadly; "if I only knew what really has befallen Philip!"

"God knows; and for the present that must content you. See! there are the engine lights; the train is coming up; in two hours and-a-half we shall be in town."

But that night the express was doomed to delay; for beyond the Chilcote station a goods train had broken down, and the line was obstructed for nearly an hour. The short summer night had waned, the stars were fading, and the lamp-lights on Waterloo-bridge were gleaming pale and yellow in the first flush of dawn, when Edith once more crossed the river. How silent were the streets! how death-like the closed houses! how unlike the great City, as it had been but two hours before, as it would be again ere the new day was two hours older! Presently Edith looked up; familiar objects were around her, and against the heaven, all on fire with the splendours of sunrise, stood out the mighty dome of the

great cathedral. A minute or two longer, and she was standing before her own door, and Mr. Heathcote had pulled the bell and they were waiting for admittance. Would they never come? Did no one keep watch in the sick man's chamber—or was the watch there no longer kept, because no longer needed? Those few moments of delay seemed worse than all that had gone before.

Presently Edith's strained and attentive ear caught the sound of footsteps—slow, tardy footsteps—pacing the long passage; and then the door was cautiously opened, and a face she had never seen before peered out curiously, and a harsh, strange voice inquired, "What was wanted?"

"I am come home," said Edith, shortly. "How is Mr. Proctor?"

"Be you the missus, then?" inquired the gruff speaker. He was a powerful, square-built man, rather short, and elderly. His bristly hair was iron-grey, his eyes were keen and cunning, his nose was broken, and there was a scar on his left cheek, that in nowise detracted from his singularly unprepossessing appearance. A mingled air of impudence and abject cringing, a something compounded of conscious authority and a dogged resolution to eat any amount of dirt, if it were necessary, characterized this interesting personage, who seemed the only living creature astir in all the house. In the midst of her extreme anxiety, Edith wondered who he could be. Mr. Heathcote scarcely wondered at all; a full conviction of the unhappy truth stole upon him the moment the stranger showed himself at the cautiously-opened door. While he was hesitating what he should say to Mrs. Proctor, in order to prepare her for the fresh calamity awaiting her, she turned to the man, and said, "Where are the servants?"

"There's only one as I knows on," he replied, "and that's Tony, the errand-boy. The young woman as was here packed up her traps, and was off like a shot, as soon as she see me take possession. She'd draw'd her wages the day before, she said, and so she'd be off to her cousin's afore things comed to the worst. Some servants doesn't think it respectable to be mixed up with such goings-on as there must be here; it's for

all the world like the rats getting away from a ship as is like to sink—he! he! he!" And the man laughed—a low, horrible, chuckling laugh, as if he had made a very capital joke indeed.

"'Goings-on!'" said Edith, bewildered. "Well, never mind now. I will go up-stairs; my husband will be expecting me, if he is awake."

"I don't think he expects no one," replied the free-and-easy stranger, "and he ain't exactly awake: no, nor exactly asleep neither."

Edith would have fallen had not Mr. Heathcote flown to support her: they were standing now in a small parlour on the ground-floor, a sort of waiting-room, where Philip generally saw those who came to him on business. It was redolent of the fumes of tobacco and of spirits, a jug of beer was on the table, and the cloth was soiled and marked with dark rings, where wet glasses had been carelessly set down.

"Don't take on, missus," said "the man in possession," for, alas! such he was, as I dare say you foresaw from the moment of his introduction—"the master ain't dead, else I should have knowed; there's no reason for keeping a death close in such a case as this, though there is such a thing as issuing a—what d'ye call it?—a *caveat*, ain't it? on the body when a gentleman breathes his last in Queer-street. Leastways there used to be such a thing; but many of the good old laws is swept away by them radical reformers—drat 'em, I say! No, the gentleman up-stairs is only in a fit, and while there's life there's hope, we do all say; though the doctor looked inkimminly serious-like when he went away, just after St. Paul's went twelve."

"I will go up-stairs," said poor Edith again, trying to steady herself on Leonard Heathcote's arm: she only comprehended one thing, and that was her husband's danger. That the man was "in possession" she began slowly to understand; but whether he would have to remain, or whether, acting for Philip, she might be able to dismiss him, she could not guess. Indeed she scarcely cared to admit the question just then; all her anxiety was to go to

her husband, and judge for herself of his state; and surely Robert Anderson would be in town in a few hours and make the requisite arrangements: the affair was as much his as Philip's; and thoroughly as she disliked her husband's partner, she must school herself to prudence, and be prepared to act with him in the coming emergency.

"There's two women up-stairs. One of 'em a widow woman," was the information volunteered by Mr. Grabb, for that was the euphonious name in which the sheriff's officer rejoiced. "The widow come this afternoon, and she sent and fetched the old lady after tea. The gas is a-burning on the landings: I ain't thought of putting it out yet." Slowly Edith and her kind friend mounted those weary stairs; at length they were on the upper landing, and Edith's trembling fingers touched the handle of her own room-door. Beside the bed sat, as Mr. Grabb had said, "two women;" but, O joy! they were no hired nurses; there were no more strange faces and unfamiliar voices to be encountered. The "widow woman" was dear, kind Mrs. Etherington, and the "old lady" her step-mother, the excellent Mrs. Kendrick.

Edith's heart revived at the sight of those kind, friendly faces; and, with Mr. Heathcote at her side, she felt that God had been, indeed, very good to her, thus tempering the chastisement He had seen fit to inflict with many mercies. Come what might, she had good, true, and capable friends about her.

But the next moment that one ray of comfort passed away, and was forgotten; for the sight of Philip, as he lay before her, deathlike and ghastly, struck her to the heart. It needed no one to tell her that he was perfectly unconscious.

"What is it?" she asked, piteously and feebly. "How long has he been in this state? What made him so ill? O! my Philip, my Philip!"

Only one part of the question did Mrs. Etherington essay to answer. "He was taken ill yesterday morning," she replied; "about noon, or rather before, some one told me. I came by appointment this, or rather yesterday afternoon, on special business, and found Dr. Clinton out of his wits for want of female assistance; for your maid, whom you left in

charge, was gone. I offered to remain; and finding how very ill Mr. Proctor was, I thought it best to send for Mrs. Kendrick; she is invaluable in a sick-chamber; and here we are, dear Mrs. Proctor, very glad to help you, and willing to stay as long as our services are required."

"Thank you, thank you," said Edith, earnestly. "God in His great mercy has sent you here; for at present I feel too bewildered to act. But what is to be done?"

"Nothing at present; Dr. Clinton has not neglected anything; you see he has applied leeches; the oppression is on the brain, and the left side is affected. We can only now obey orders, and wait the return of consciousness."

"Is it paralysis, then?" asked Edith, tremulously. She had always been accustomed to associate an attack of paralysis with quickly-coming death.

"Dr. Clinton would not say it was exactly that; he said the seizure was of a paralytic character in combination with some other form of disease, which he did not specify. He asked where you were, and said he would telegraph to you himself; he left us cooling applications for the head, and urged upon us the necessity for perfect tranquillity and composure as soon as the invalid should manifest the slightest symptom of returning sensibility. A little before midnight he came again, and told us that he would probably be here very early in the morning. He said there was no change in the patient; we must still persevere in applying the cold lotions and guard against the slightest excitement when consciousness should be restored."

And then Mrs. Etherington forcibly took possession of Edith, and drew her away from the bed where she was bending over the senseless form and kissing the pale, rigid lips and the white, blood-stained temples from which some of the rich dark curls had been hastily shorn away. For a moment she resisted, saying—"I cannot go out of the room till there is some change; do not ask me, Mrs. Etherington!"

But Mrs. Etherington answered, "You can do nothing now, dear, except watch as we are watching; and if you watch now, you will not be able to render more active services presently,

when they are required. You have had a terrible shock, you have had a rapid journey, and you have endured some hours of suspense. Come with me to the drawing-room; I have everything ready for your refreshment—nay, you must take something: I will have no denial. It is for your husband's sake I urge it; when once he is sensible again you will not like to leave him even for needful rest; and remember, you are not quite strong, and there are certain limits that human nature cannot exceed. If there is the shadow of an approaching change I will summon you."

Edith felt that her friend was right, so she took Mr. Heathcote's proffered arm, and went down into the drawing-room, striving like an obedient child to do as she was bid. She forced herself to swallow some food, though the first morsel well-nigh choked her: and then she lay down on the sofa to rest, if she could not sleep. And after a few minutes' painful reverie, she became drowsy; the sight she had seen on Waterloo-bridge—the stars of heaven and the lamps of earth paling in the rosy dawn, the bright gleams just touching the dark, sullen waters issuing from the archways, and the grey cathedral dome rising so solemnly against the flushing sky—blended in her mind with the sad memories of that night and morning, and vague, broken reminiscences of Wordsworth's noble sonnet on "London at Sunrise" floated drowsily through her brain. A prayer for Philip melted away into a remembrance of the golden light on the Temple Gardens; then she was saying involuntarily, "Earth has not anything to show more fair," and then she slept the deep, heavy sleep of exhaustion and sorrow: and Mr. Heathcote likewise took some rest, while Edith's kind friends kept their anxious watch in the sick man's chamber.

A flood of sunlight was pouring on the opposite houses when Edith awoke; there was the usual bustle in the offices below, and the roar of the great tide of commerce that circles round St. Paul's had commenced its hoarse, ceaseless murmur. Calmed and refreshed, Edith sprang up; she was herself again; the stupefaction was gone; she could commend her husband to her Heavenly Father, and she could address herself with

her usual promptitude and skill to the duties that were awaiting her. Very grateful she felt to the friend whose wisdom and considerate kindness had constrained her to seek the rest from which she could arise with composed mind, and renewed energies, and invigorated forces. She went up-stairs. Alas! there was no change, only the pale face showed more ghastly in the full light of the brilliant summer morning. Mrs. Kendrick was going home for awhile, and Mrs. Etherington was glad now to lie down and take the rest she so much needed. "We must husband all our forces; we must not squander any strength," she said as she went away, leaving Edith to keep watch over her husband. "We do not know yet, how much may be required of us."

For one hour Edith sat alone—now bathing the pallid brow—now kissing the livid, tightened lips, or the listless, clammy hands—now hanging over the pillows in an agony of despair—now letting the hot tears come fast and freely—now wiping them away, lest he should revive and be injured by her want of composure; and, through all, pouring forth such an anguish of prayer—broken, disjointed, wrestling prayer—as none know who have not stood face to face with the sorrow that is to them darker and deeper, and more passionately repelled, than death itself. Death would be gentle, merciful, compared with such a watch as Edith kept beside that precious form, from whence motion, conscious life and reason, had departed, it might be, to return no more.

> "To die for what we love!
> Ah! there is strength in the true heart for this;
> It is to live without the vanished light
> That strength is needed."

At the end of the hour Mr. Heathcote came in, accompanied by Dr. Clinton. The doctor would say but little, yet he shook his head ominously, and looked gravely at Mr. Heathcote as he turned away from the bed. Edith interpreted that mournful glance as saying—"Human skill can do no more."

"When will there be a change?" whispered Edith.

"I cannot tell; probably at the same hour as the attack

commenced—between eleven and twelve o'clock. It is nearly eleven now."

"How did it come on?" she asked next.

"If you will come with me into another room I will tell you," replied Dr. Clinton. "It is my rule never to speak of the state of my patients in their presence. We never know how far the brain is capable or incapable of receiving an impression. My information comes from one of the clerks down-stairs, from that worthless young woman who ran away yesterday, and from a letter which I found open on Mr. Proctor's desk. Being quite in the dark as to the cause of his sudden seizure, I felt justified, as his friend and medical adviser, in making myself acquainted with its contents."

When they were in the adjoining chamber, Edith asked—"Who was the letter from, Dr. Clinton?"

"From Mr. Anderson, your husband's partner."

"With bad news, I doubt not. Do not be afraid to tell me, I partly know it. Is he coming?"

"No, indeed, the rascal! The letter was not posted till he was far on his way to America. It is a bad business, Mrs. Proctor, but we must make the best of it."

CHAPTER XXXV.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

Dr. Clinton was right; it was indeed a "bad business," and how to follow his advice, and "make the best of it," poor Edith could in no wise comprehend. It was some minutes before she fully realized the critical position of their affairs, but slowly, and O, how painfully! the truth was clearly revealed: the firm was insolvent, its liabilities were large, and Robert Anderson, having first taken good care of himself, had quitted the country, and left his duped and unfortunate partner to bear the whole brunt of the inevitable struggle of passing through the Bankruptcy Court. And in the meantime Philip lay senseless in his chamber, to all appearance not far from the verge of the eternal world. Must Edith alone, and unassisted, weather the impending storm?

Mr. Anderson's letter was about the most heartless composition ever penned by an unscrupulous rogue; it had, however, one merit, it was frank, and very much to the point, and, after a long, yet lucid explanation of the endless entanglements of the business, ended with a sneering message to Mrs. Proctor, congratulating her on being rid at last of the person who, as apprentice, assistant, and partner, had ever been the object of her undisguised aversion! Edith was sufficiently a woman of business to understand that nothing short of absolute ruin, as far as business relations were concerned, was to be encountered.

"Where is Mr. Heathcote?" she said, faintly, when she had read the letter for the second time. "I want him to see this—this dreadful letter."

"I will fetch him," replied the doctor; "you cannot do

better than take counsel with your friend; in the present state of affairs, he will advise you far more ably than I can. For some years, first as clerk, and then as active partner, he was in one of our first-class commercial houses; it is only in latter times that he has devoted himself entirely to the work of the ministry. He has the character of being a very clever, and thorough business man; I know there were many in the City who deplored his early withdrawal from the arena of commerce; had he continued in the firm to which he belonged, there is very little doubt but that he would have realized a princely fortune before he was fifty years of age. You cannot do better, in your husband's present state, than place entire confidence in Mr. Heathcote. After all, I think a little mixing with the world, in its busiest and most common-place aspects, must be an incalculable advantage to a minister; an unmitigated college-life savours too much of the cloister; half your Reverends live up the clouds, and understand the difficulties and perplexities of their flocks as little as I understand the physical and mental calibre of a Central African chief, in his normal condition. Learning can scarcely be too highly appreciated; and yet all the honours ever taken at Oxford and Cambridge can never make a man a *pastor*, and that, I think, is what God requires His ministers to be. But here I am, chattering away, and you are wanting Mr. Heathcote."

At Dr. Clinton's call Leonard quickly came; he had already learnt much from the eloquent Mr. Grabb, who was now sitting in the little parlour down-stairs, smoking his matutinal pipe, and drinking cold brandy-and-water, which he had ordered one of the boys in the printing-office to fetch from the nearest tavern; indeed, his requirements of this nature had been so continuous ever since he entered the house, that the errand-boy ventured to suggest that his inside must be made of sponge. But Mr. Heathcote had no idea of the defalcation of Mr. Anderson, and when he had read the letter, which Edith silently placed in his hand, he perceived at once that matters were even more seriously complicated than he had supposed. Bankruptcy—and, as far as the junior partner was concerned, of a most dishonourable character—

was inevitable. There was nothing to be done, but to allow things to take their course.

"Well," said Edith, with eager solicitude in her eyes and her voice, when Mr. Heathcote had at length finished the long, wretched epistle, "what can I do? What would it be best—what would it be *right* to do?"

"I am afraid the right thing in this instance is little more than passive acquiescence in the proceedings of the law. Dear Mrs. Proctor, do not be quite overwhelmed; God will help you. Out of all this evil good will certainly be derived: you are hardly tried, I know; but trust a little longer: God is still your refuge and your strength, and you need not fear; He will not lay upon you any burden that you are unable to bear. Remember the children of Israel on the shores of the Red Sea, the hosts of Egypt behind them, and the untraversable waters before! They were bidden to *stand still*, and see the salvation of God. And again, it is written—'Their strength is to sit still.'"

"I have more faith now than I had last night," she replied, quietly. "I do believe that out of all this care and misery a blessing will spring up. All must be given up, I see. All, without reserve! that is the right thing to do, and it will be the best and the easiest thing for us in the end. In affairs of this kind there is nothing like perfect candour. From this moment, I feel that nothing in the house is mine or Philip's. But O! if Philip were able to give orders—if he were by my side, I should not mind the failure! We have not been extravagant, or dishonest; my dear husband has toiled night and day to provide things honest in the sight of all men. It is the unceasing labour, the long, painful anxiety, the harass, the solicitude that is killing him! For my own part, I am glad that the blow has fallen; it has long been to us the sword of Damocles; and the reality can hardly exceed the apprehensions that have haunted us continually, ever since we came to town. We are young, we have energy, we can deny ourselves, and we have each other and our children to work for. Out of the ruin of to-day may arise the prosperity of future years if—if God will spare the precious life of—"

Edith's voice died away; the doubt which her words implied was too painful to be endured with composure. But after a minute she rallied, and said firmly, "This catastrophe does not crush me. We may outlive the storm: only tell me what I ought to do, and I will do it; of course I must act for my husband."

Compliments were not in Leonard Heathcote's way, but he could scarcely repress the admiration with which he listened to Edith's quiet words. "True woman! true wife!" muttered the doctor, below his breath; and Leonard said to himself, "God bless you, dear friend! so would my Lottie be, if she were placed in the like circumstances." Then he replied aloud, "Mrs. Proctor, can you trust me? May I see your husband's books?"

"You know that we both trust you fully; there is no man in the world in whom Philip confides so firmly as in you. You have an influence over him that no other man has, or ever had. I shall not risk his displeasure in placing everything, without reserve, in your hands."

"Thank you; I will do my best. I am quite a man of business, you know: I understand all its complicities. I can manage very well if I may have the books. I will communicate with the creditors forthwith."

And so it was settled. Leonard shut himself up with ledgers, and day-books, and order-books in poor Philip's dark little den. The man in possession sauntered about, and cracked rough jokes, to the disgust of the men in the offices, and the charwoman in the house. And Edith betook herself again to the sick chamber, where, in her earnest, agonizing solicitude for her husband, she quickly forgot the existence of Mr. Grabb, and the utter wreck of her worldly fortunes, which had at last overtaken her.

The long, sad day wore away—all the bustle and turmoil of life without, the shadow of death within! The hours glided by; that familiar voice from the cupola of St. Paul's tolled quarter after quarter, and stroke after stroke; the hot, close afternoon waned, and the narrow streets lay in cool shadow, and still there was no change. Sometimes Edith

feared that there would be no change, save that which parts flesh and spirit. She feared lest there should be no awakening from that death-like trance on this side the grave, no revival of sense and memory, no recognition, no last looks, no last words. And the agony of this apprehension was almost beyond endurance; again and again she sank on her knees, praying that if it were possible this cup might pass from her —that at least it might be vouchsafed to her to hear from those dear lips, ere they closed for ever on earth, some words of peace, some assurance that the end of life was indeed gained, and the hope of eternal life, in and through Jesus Christ, steadfast and sure. She thought she could be almost content to be left alone, in an empty, dreary world, if only she were certain that the parting was but for a season—that they would meet again in their Father's house, to be for ever with the Lord. Yes, she felt that she could—bitter as it must be—forego the sight of those dear eyes, and the sound of that dear, familiar voice, and the clasp of that warm, strong hand, if only she were certified of the safety of that immortal soul. Almost had Philip been persuaded to be a Christian; but had not the cares of the world and the weary burden of his anxieties choked the good seed of the Blessed Word?

Then she thought of that miserable time, a year ago, when she had persuaded herself that Philip was no more the deeply-beloved of her heart. Justly estranged for awhile she might have been; but had she not nursed her proud resentment too long? She remembered her own dull, aching sense of sorrow, the void that had oppressed her through all those sad days of alienation; but more clearly she remembered Philip's shadowed brow and depressed mind. She felt now that she had been very cruel, that she had tortured him with her coldness, and tried him very sorely; especially the recollection of that night when he came to meet her on her return from chapel—the last Sunday evening in Liverpool—when she had repelled his affection, and hardened herself against his endeavours for reconciliation, came vividly before her mind. True it was, the shadow was not abiding; long since the coldness had melted away; injured pride had died out, and Philip

was dearer to her than ever; but she could not forget the pain she had given him; with cruel pertinacity those hours came back again with ever-recurring force and minuteness.

And now it seemed too probable that Philip was dying: she would never be able to assure him again of her unchanged affection; and while life lasted the recollection of that sole, brief estrangement would haunt her memory—a spectre of the past, never to be laid, and never to be shunned!

O! if we would know whether we are verily guilty towards those whom we love best, let us not coldly weigh our merits and their deserts; let not pride be suffered to adjudicate; let not wounded affection be allowed to sway the judgment, but let us imagine ourselves on the brink of separation; ourselves standing midway in the path of mortal life—they suddenly borne away to the end of their journey; we *here*, alone and desolate—they *there*, where our impetuous anger, our proud reserve, ay, and our vain repentance, can touch them no more. In the shadow of the grave should we examine ourselves, and contemplate those whom God has given to us to be dear as our own souls.

The twilight had faded, and Edith, who had watched the first red gleam in the morning sky, saw the last rosy flush fade from a fleecy cloud that floated like a spirit of beauty far, far above the din, and smoke, and turmoil of the busy city, and still the expected change came not. Dr. Clinton paid another hasty visit, and went away again, for he had several critical cases to occupy his attention, and Edith began to expect Mrs. Etherington, who had gone for a little while to her own house. She was thinking of lighting the gas, when, as she sat keeping her sad watch by the bed, she thought she perceived something like motion, where all day there had been such perfect death-like rest: she bent over the white form, and, in the faint imperfect light, could just dimly discern that there was at last a change; but whether it were for life or for death she could not tell.

She ventured to whisper his name; and in strange, thick, low utterance came the answer, "Are you there, Edie, Edie?"

"Yes, dearest! Are you better?"

"I don't know: I am dying, Edie · I am so glad you are come."

"No, dear, you will not die if we take care of you. But you must be quite quiet now: I have some medicine that Dr. Clinton left for you."

"It is better for me to die. I have ruined you, Edie I remember it now: I have done you no good, but harm."

"Hush! hush! my poor darling! Indeed, for my sake, you must say no more; only, dear, never mind about the ruin: I don't mind it! When you get well we will begin life over again. Dear me! we are not thirty, either of us, and we shall have learnt experience. You cannot think how brave I feel: indeed, the money trouble is nothing, if only you will get well and strong again."

"Do you know that you will lose your home?"

"Wherever my husband is will be my home."

"But the stock—the furniture—all we have must go!"

"I suppose so: it seems right and just for it to go. What then? we have each other and the dear children; and we have brains to think and plan, and hands to work; we will start afresh, Philip: I am not at all afraid Only do not think about it now: it will do you harm."

And Edith's brave words did their work, for they were not spoken for the nonce, but from the very depths of her heart: with God to bless her, and with her husband by her side, she was *not* afraid of cares, or poverty, or toil. Even a vision of Mr. Grabb, holding solitary Bacchanalian orgies in her drawing-room, did not greatly disquiet her; and from her tone and spirit her husband gathered calmness and strength.

When Mrs. Etherington returned, she thought Philip was certainly better. She had feared that returning consciousness might be only the harbinger of approaching dissolution; but there was an undefinable something in the expression of his face that told rather of renewed existence than of quickly-waning life. The deathly pallor was still there; one hand and arm lay nearly paralyzed on the counterpane, and articulation was difficult and indistinct; but there was a light in

the eyes, dim and heavy as they were, that proclaimed unmistakeably the fresh impetus given to the life-springs, that had seemed a little while ago at their lowest ebb; the constitution, naturally vigorous and untampered with, was about to assert its sway; there would be still a season of suffering, and weakness, and intense anxiety for those who kept loving watch by his side, but there was every reason now to hope that this sickness of Philip Proctor's would not be unto death.

Such, at least, was Mrs. Etherington's impression; and it was confirmed when, later in the evening, Dr. Clinton came in, and congratulated Edith upon her good nursing.

But, though the worst was mercifully averted, Philip's progress to convalescence was slow and uncertain; sometimes he would seem better, and his anxious wife would begin to cherish bright hopes of what a few more days might effect, and again the bad symptoms would return, the numbness and nervelessness of the stricken members become more apparent, and the whole system appear sinking under the oppression of mind, and the long weariness of confinement. Sickness was to Philip Proctor an entirely new phase of existence; but he was very patient, and as Matty said, when she came back, as easy to manage as a baby.

And so the time went on, and Mr. Heathcote kept his word, and managed Philip's affairs with an ability and an address that surprised even his wife, who, of course, gave him credit for the profoundest sagacity, and for capabilities rarely, if ever, exceeded in the nineteenth century! He rather seemed to enjoy having to deal with day-books and ledgers once more. For old associations' sake, he affectionately regarded business matters; he only regretted that the task, which in itself was far from irksome, should have been imposed upon him through the painful necessities of his friend.

It was owing to him that the most favourable arrangements were concluded, so that Philip and Edith were permitted to remain unmolested for a far longer period than they had dared to anticipate, and it was not till the end of September that they found themselves called upon to leave the house

where they had suffered so much, and that was endeared to them for many reasons, notwithstanding all the struggles and the anxieties that had been their lot ever since the very commencement of their London career.

It was the last evening of their stay, and the husband and wife sat alone together in the drawing-room, when all things were arranged for removal on the morrow, for convenience of sale. Susy and baby were again staying with Mrs. Heathcote, and Philip, and Edith, and Mary were going to spend a few days with Mrs. Etherington, till the humble domicile they had taken should be ready for their reception.

Philip still bore the traces of his severe illness; he was very thin, and he stooped, and his face showed many lines of anxiety, and pain of body and of mind; he looked quite forty years of age. Really, his thirtieth birthday had yet to arrive. The evening was wet and chilly, and they were glad to draw towards the fire, and enjoy, for the last time, the comfort of the hearth which, true to her principles, Edith had kept ever bright and cheery. They were rather silent, and, for some time, they listened sadly to the rain beating against the windows, and to the moaning and sighing of the wild autumnal wind in the long passages and empty rooms of the nearly deserted house.

At last Philip spoke:—"Edith, I have something to tell you: I want to say it here, before we go to another place, and now, before we begin what seems to me a new and untried career."

"Well, dearest?"

"Do you remember one Sunday evening in Myrtle-place, soon after little Mary was born—the Sunday evening when you told me you intended making full and public profession of your faith?"

"I remember it well, dear Philip."

"And you have never regretted that decision, my dear?"

"Never! How could I? It was only deferred too long."

"But I was so unkind to you—so unjust. I must have pained you exceedingly."

"Never mind that now, dear Philip. I, too, was very unkind to you before we left Castle-street."

"And I deserved it. Edith, it was your coldness and displeasure then, when contrasted with your natural gentleness and your previous warm affection, that first roused me from my egotistical complacency. I began to doubt myself: and from doubting my own wisdom in temporal matters, I fell to considering my long-cherished opinions on matters of faith; and there, too, I was led, or rather constrained—for it was spite of myself—to arrive at the conviction that I had been all my life little better than a fool."

"My dear husband! But is that all you wanted to tell me?"

"No, Edie; only a part of it. I want to make the same avowal to you, that you made to me so long ago, on that memorable Sunday evening in Myrtle-place. I want to tell you that I henceforth renounce the self-righteous creed I have so long professed; it is *not* enough to be upright, and strictly moral, and a rigid Nonconformist. I have found it so; and I desire now to cast in my lot with the people of God, with those whose only trust is in Jesus Christ our Lord; who strive to live to His glory, and who find in Him their strong salvation, their only and inalienable hope, their joy, and their earnest of the peace on earth and the bliss in heaven, which is their eternal inheritance."

"O, Philip!" and Edith could only hide her face, and weep in the fullness of her great joy. Presently she said, "O, how good God is! How happy we are! Philip, dear, will you not kneel down with me now, and thank God for me—for us both? I can bear anything now that you and I are travelling together on the same road. Never mind the poverty; it is good for us, or it would not have come; we are rich, though poor in worldly goods—rich in love, rich in friends, rich in content, and, above all, rich in the blessing that is more than all other blessings, now, or in the world to come! O, Philip! I shall always love this dingy city-home, where this last great blessing has come to me. Now let us thank our Father for all his mercies."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

QUIET DAYS.

THREE years had passed away, and again it was the bright warm summer; the skies were blue, and flowers blooming, and waters calm and clear, and woodlands rich in all the leafy beauty of a sunny, genial June. Edith was sitting in her own pretty parlour—parlours over which Edith held sway were always, in some way or other, pretty and cheerful. It was about seven o'clock, and she was just finishing some task of needlework, and wondering what made Philip so late, for he had promised to return early on that particular evening, that they might take a walk together, when the swing of the little gate struck her ear, and she looked up to see her husband walking briskly along the narrow gravel-walk, which led to their front door. She hastened, according to custom, to let him in, and then hurried back to infuse the tea, and see that all things were in readiness for their pleasant evening meal, while Philip went up-stairs to look at the children, who were already in bed, but lying awake for papa's good-night kiss.

Time had dealt kindly with Edith; the tints of youth, it is true, returned no more to the cheek that had paled so long ago; but the brow was calm and smooth, the brown curls were as abundant as ever, and the whole aspect was quietly, peacefully happy. Philip had not fared so well: the long pressure of toil, and struggle, and anxious care had left its traces ineffaceably on the outer man; the brow still bore a peculiar weight of thought; there were lines about the mouth that told of harassing days, and restless nights, and evil deferred instead of remedied; and the rich clusters of dark hair were mingled here and there with threads of silver: there

was every prospect of Philip Proctor being grisly-grey before he was forty! And yet the prematurely whitened locks, and the care-worn gaze that sometimes deepened almost into melancholy, were rather the results of past anxieties than of present sorrows; for at last fortune seemed to smile upon his efforts, and he no longer rose early, and late took rest, and ate the bread of carefulness, for naught. The blessing of God was upon the work of his hands, and upon all the fruit of his labour.

You must remember that we last saw Philip and Edith sitting by the fire-side of their city-home, on the eve of leaving it—probably for ever. Philip's conduct had been so thoroughly honourable, he had been so candid and painstaking in all his transactions, and he was so clearly a sufferer through the fraudulent dealings of his partner, that the compassion and sympathy of several influential persons in the literary world were strongly excited, as soon as the real state of the case was publicly known. Even the creditors, seeing the aspect the affair assumed, were inclined to believe that it would be to their own advantage not to proceed to extremities; and when the books and the balance-sheet were fairly in their hands, they could not fail to perceive that Philip Proctor's greatest error lay in having placed undue reliance in a man who was undoubtedly as reckless, as unscrupulous, and as wildly ambitious as it was possible for a tradesman to be. Left to himself, Philip might have succeeded in placing the Castle-street business on a sound and firm basis; and so settled, it would probably have become, in process of time, a thriving, prosperous concern; but, his fortunes once linked with those of Robert Anderson, the possibility of even a moderate success was swept away. No mere human patience, perseverance, courage, and industry could ever have availed on the one side, while on the other side qualities of quite another character were continually developed. Philip's unwearying toil, his close application, and his exactness, were quite unable to make head against his partner's pretentious arrogance, and swaggering display, and entire want of principle. Well was it for him that fair

fame, as well as fortune, was not involved in the general wreck that naturally supervened when Robert Anderson had steamed down the Mersey, *en route* to the Western World.

After all, Philip's unflagging industry and zealous promptitude were not quite in vain: those with whom he had done business were more than satisfied; and when they understood the real state of the case, they were most anxious that he should commence again on his own account. The principal creditors were quite willing to lend their assistance, and Mrs. Etherington's influence was found to be more weighty and extensive than even her most intimate friends had supposed. The result was, that Philip once more embarked in the printing and publishing trade, in a very modest way certainly, and with a full determination to feel his way, and run no more risks, which might either terminate in prosperity or in disgrace. He had had enough of rowing against the strong tide, which, in these days of competition, men of insufficient capital are bound to encounter. He had struggled manfully, it is true, but the combat had ended in defeat; and the long toil, and the wearing dread and care, had added about a dozen years to his life: at thirty he felt himself quite an elderly man. Also, he began to perceive that speculation, even in a common, straightforward way of business, was but a kind of gambling; every caution might be observed, every nerve strained towards the accomplishment of the desired end, and yet one unlucky throw overturn the equilibrium of the whole concern.

So, in rather straitened quarters, and with no more assistance than was absolutely necessary, Philip once more addressed himself to the conquest of what seemed very like an adverse fate. How he prospered in his new undertaking his own words may give us some idea.

He came down just as Edith was ready to pour out his tea. He looked so bright, that she wondered whether his visit to the children had been more satisfactory than usual, and she hoped he had not waked the baby—not the fat rosy Master Philip, but little Miss Millicent, who had not yet seen her first birthday.

"Well, my dear!" he began, as soon as he was comfortably settled at the table; "I have something to propose; what do you think it is?"

"I cannot guess; unless you are tired, and wish to give up the walk we have planned to take this evening?"

"No, indeed! I have been counting on this very walk for the last fortnight, and the evening is beautiful; it seems made on purpose for us! But what do you say to going down to Bayscliff again, for two or three weeks?"

"I say that the bare idea is almost too delightful to be entertained. But, do you think we shall be justified?"

"Fully! I have learnt many lessons, Edie, and one of them is not to be penny-wise and pound-foolish. We have none of us had a change since this time three years, and I think a little stay at Bayscliff would be extremely beneficial. I have no doubt that what would be spent in travelling expenses, and lodgings, would be saved in doctor's bills; and we should both set to work the harder, and with the better will, after a short season of recreation."

"But could you be with us?"

"Not all the time, but I could so arrange with Foster as to leave town generally on Thursday evening, and not return till the following Monday afternoon. The Heathcotes are going down the week after next: Mrs. Heathcote is anxious to dip that new baby of hers in the salt sea-water; it's a pretty little thing, and it seems good-tempered, as it ought to be with such a father and mother; one cannot imagine an evil-disposed Heathcote! But it is not nearly so fine a child as our little Milly was, at six months old. Really, Edie, I never saw a baby equal to ours."

"You conceited man! how people will laugh at you if you persist in going about celebrating the praises of your youngest child! Why, Mr. Heathcote himself was enjoying a sly joke at your expense, the last time he was here: he was proposing a baby-show in Kensington-gardens."

"At which I should gain the first prize, while he would be merely a 'highly-commended' exhibitor. I tell you our little Milly is a perfect queen of babies; and then what notice

she takes! I believe she will talk before she can run alone."

"Very probably; girls are said to be more nimble with their tongues than the opposite sex. But about Bayscliff, you really think it would be *right* for us to go?"

"I really do, my good little wife. I can afford it very well; I have been making a calculation, and I find that a visit to Bayscliff may be included under the catalogue of 'clearly warrantable expenses.' Therefore, make your arrangements, and let us be off while this glorious weather lasts."

"Very well; I am nothing loth, I can assure you. How delighted darling Mary will be, she remembers the shore so well! it will do her so much good to be wheeled about the sands in her perambulator. Bayscliff is a lovely place, is it not?"

"Really, Edie, I can scarcely pronounce an opinion from my own observation; you and the Heathcotes concur in attributing to it every possible charm and advantage, but I really saw so little of it myself, that I have but a very indistinct recollection of its beauties."

"Ah! poor Philip, you were ill at ease in those days, and so was I too. You only paid us one short visit, and all the time you seemed buried in thought; you were thin and sallow, and the cares of a nation seemed to be resting on your shoulders; your very gait, your every attitude gave one the idea of a person bending under the weight of innumerable perplexities and overwhelming responsibilities. There was hopelessness and depression in every guesture, every word, and every look."

"Indeed I must have been a miserable object! But I could not have looked more wretched and despairing than I really was. O! Edie, my darling, those were terrible days; God only knows the suffering of that season, when every hope was blighted, every effort baffled, and every hour seemed to come laden with some fresh perplexity, some new and overwhelming anxiety. I wonder how I sustained the burden as I did, for I could not then entirely commit my way to God,

and trust to Him to bring to pass all that was really for my happiness and benefit. Without you, Edie, I must have sunk under the pressure of that trial at a very early period: but you always cheered me; one glance at your face, even in your saddest moments, used to make me strong again, when I had almost sunk down in despair; but for you and and the children, scarcely caring what might be the issue."

"Yes! those were dark days indeed! It was really a relief to me when the worst came; nothing could exceed the misery of that long suspense of dread, and that ceaseless apprehension of an uncertain evil which might be postponed for a time only. But O! Philip, dear, how good God was to us! In the midst of wrath He remembered mercy, and He strengthened us in the hour of weakness, and made our path plain before our faces, though at one time we could only see the single step we were about to take. Thinking of those sorrowful, wearying days reminds me of some lines that Mrs. Stanton used to sing—

'I do not ask to see the distant scene;
One step's enough for me.'"

"If we could but always feel that the one step was really enough! And then, Edith, my experience was more in accordance with the succeeding verse, for I remember it well. I can say now, looking back to that fiery trial of my poor, weak faith—

'It was not ever thus—nor prayed that Thou
Wouldst lead me on.
I loved to choose and see my path,
But now—lead *Thou* me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!'

O, my love, you will never know what I endured when, day by day, I felt that the darkness was thickening, and the terrible storm approaching. And then that morning, when Anderson's letter came;—I had risen early and toiled away till breakfast-time, and when I sat down to the table I could not eat for physical weariness—for I had scarcely slept through the night—and my brain felt overwrought, and the gloomiest

presentiments overshadowed me. Then came the letters—I carried them to the counting-house, dreading, as I always did then, to open them, and there were the terrible words!—the extremity of evil, as I thought then, a misfortune even worse than I had ever anticipated."

"Poor Philip! And you were alone; I was not there to help you to bear the blow."

"No, or I might not have given way as I did. And yet I do not know: I believe nothing could have prevented that illness; it was Nature's revenge for her wrongs; for I had worked past my strength, my brain had been overtasked for years, and I had gone on like a person who never dreams of the possibility of failing health and shattered nerves. I remember that at first I felt stunned, and incapable of anything like consecutive thought: I sat a long time, or what seemed to me such, trying to collect my scattered senses, and wondering whether I was going silly. Then I felt very drowsy, and so confused that I began to fancy that after all it was only a dream, and I tried to awake and find myself in my own bed; but there was the letter before my eyes, and it seemed written in characters supernaturally large and distinct. Then a sudden keen pain shot through my temples—so keen a pain, that I could not repress a sharp cry, and then came a sensation of floating on wild, tossing billows, and the noise of the sea was in my ears, and I remember nothing more. Hours afterwards, when consciousness returned, you were standing by me."

"And how intensely thankful I was to hear your voice again, thick and feeble and stammering as it was! I had begun to fear, Philip that I was to hear it no more on earth; and O, I was not certain about you. I knew there *was* a change—I know your views were altered since your acquaintance with Mr. Heathcote; but I was not sure whether you had indeed accepted Christ as your Saviour; whether you had left all, and surrendered yourself to Him as your only and perfect Salvation. That evening I felt as if I were content to part with you—knowing it could be but for a season—if only I knew that you were resting securely on the Rock of Ages!"

"I am not sure that it was so then: I hardly know; and yet I think I *had* come to renounce all my fancied goodness, all my cherished virtues and self-righteousness. I had come to say—

'Thou bleeding Lamb
The true morality is love of Thee.'

But I had not then given myself to Christ; I had not then quite resolved to give up my worldly aims and ambitions; it was afterwards, in those long weary hours when life and death seemed battling for the mastery, that peace came—that, in a strength that I knew could never fail me, I vowed to give myself, body and soul, to Him whose love had redeemed me from all my sins, and opened to me the gate of heaven."

"It was in the spring that the change began—was it not, Philip?"

"Yes, dearest; or rather very late in the winter. I hardly know how it was: I was very miserable about our affairs; I was toiling and striving more like a slave than an English man of business; and yet matters were in nowise mended, but rather growing worse. My heart failed me; a dull sense of wretchedness oppressed me; in this mood I sat down one day, feeling so worn that any kind of rest would be welcome, to correct the proofs of Mr. Heathcote's first volume of sermons. The first sheet I took up bore these well-known words, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' I read the text as I had read it hundreds of times before—thoughtlessly, and without receiving any kind of impression. Then I commenced the sermon. The style was simplicity itself, and yet it had that indescribable charm which rivets the attention of the coldest and the most careless. I could not tell you much about it now; I only know it was extremely earnest, and most affectionate; and as I read, my heart was stirred within me; I began to feel as though the promise was indeed for me; and I yearned to lay hold on it and make it mine. A little while after, when talking with Mr. Heathcote, the same subject came under discussion, and almost, as it were, in spite of myself, I told him somewhat of the weariness and restlessness

that seemed worse to bear than even the pressing temporal anxieties which surrounded me. He spoke to me, as you may imagine, with great force and extreme earnestness, but with so much gentleness, and with so much delicacy, that even my proud spirit could find no cause of offence. As we parted he said with emphasis—'So He giveth his beloved sleep.' And from that hour I felt that the rest, the calm, the repose for which I longed, was to be found only in Christ. When I was so very ill I thought perhaps the rest would not be in this life; but that sleep of the beloved, which is softer and sweeter than any earthly slumber."

"Philip, do you know, I have scarcely an anxiety in the world now? With our faces set Zionward, and God's peace in our souls, and the promise of the joy to come, nothing can very much harm us."

"If our darling Mary were but a little stronger: I sometimes think, Edie, we shall not keep her very long."

"And I have the same thought: but, Philip, hard as would be the parting, it would not be without comfort. We know now that she can never be as other girls are; she will never walk—never even support herself in an upright position: our precious child knows nothing of life but its suffering and weariness; and I fancy she longs for that other and higher life, where pain, and sickness, and langour, are never known. When I see her poor little frame worn out with anguish, and her dear face white with exhaustion, I feel that I could let her go without a murmur. I cannot doubt that she is one of the Good Shepherd's little lambs; and if He should take her away to be with Him for ever, how great will be her gain!"

"Yes, we must leave her in His hands. We must leave all in His hands. We must say—

> 'So long Thy power has led us,
> Sure it still will lead us on,
> O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night is gone;
> And, with the morn, those angel-faces smile,
> Whom we have loved long since, and lost awhile.'

Perhaps our Mary may be there before us, in the Father's kingdom, waiting to welcome us to our home."

"And after a time she will seem not even lost awhile. We do not know yet what it is to be linked with those who have won the victory, and entered into rest. I have heard Mrs. Heathcote speaking of her aunt whom she loved so much; and yet more—I have listened to Mrs. Etherington when she has been speaking of her husband, who has been in the grave for years now; and I am sure to her he is not lost, even for 'awhile.' I believe she lives more with him than with any living friend; their earthly union is, indeed, dissolved; but the communion of heart and soul is almost unbroken; day by day the veil wears thinner, and the brightness of the world to come is more real, and seems closer at hand."

"Well, dearest! we must cease talking now, for if we are to take our walk it is quite time to set out. We will settle about our journey as we walk along. You are sure you have confidence in your new servant?"

"O yes! I can trust her fully; but she is not, and never can be to me what Matty was. But I am glad she is married at last; I think John Fraser will make her an excellent husband."

"And so do I; she deserves a happy home of her own, for she has been to us a most faithful servant. Ah! Edith, we have had many blessings, many comforts and moments of joy, even when the clouds were heaviest and blackest. We have always found a few roses among the thorns that hedged up our path."

"Yes, indeed! one thing we have gained by coming to London, and that is, most excellent friends. What should we have done in our trouble without Mrs. Etherington and the Heathcotes?"

"What, indeed? But you see God was gracious to us; and made provision beforehand for our time of trial. Edie, dear! we might go on all night recalling the many mercies that have been showered upon us during our married life, for even the sorrows were mercies in disguise. There was a 'needs-be' for every difficulty and every care. And now, it has pleased our heavenly Father to give us a season of

prosperous calm; I have a thriving business, our darling children are still preserved to us, we have dear friends, tried and proved indeed; and we have each other, and our love is far fuller and deeper than in those old halcyon days of our early wedded life; and we know now that we are travelling in the same road, with the same trust, and joy, and hope, and the same promises of the glory to be revealed. Yes! out of evil has blessing been wrought; and all things, dark and bright, have worked together for our good. Thank God for all His dealings towards us, His most unworthy servants."

And Edith replied in a voice tremulous with deep feeling, "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven. O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

THE END.

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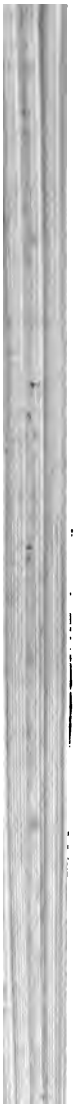
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